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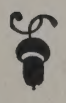
SHINING FERRY

BY

A. T. QUILLER-COUCH



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BOOK I

SHINING FERRY

CHAPTER I

ROSEWARNE OF HALL

JOHN ROSEWARNE sat in his counting-house at Hall, dictating a letter to his confidential clerk. The letter ran—

"DEAR SIR,—In answer to yours of the 6th inst., I beg to inform you that in consequence of an arrangement with the Swedish firms, by which barrel-staves will be trimmed and finished to three standard lengths before shipment, we are enabled to offer an additional discount of five per cent. for the coming season on orders of five thousand staves and upwards. Such orders, however, should reach us before the fishery begins, as we hold ourselves free to raise the price at any time after 1st July. A consignment is expected from the Baltic within the next fortnight."

The little clerk looked up. His glance inquired, "Is that all?"

"Wait a minute." His master seemed to be reflecting; then leaning back in his chair and gripping

its arms while he stared out of the bow-window before him, he resumed his dictation—

"I hope to be in Plymouth on Wednesday next, and that you will hold yourself ready for a call between two and three in the afternoon at your office."

"I beg your pardon, sir," the clerk interposed, "but Mr. Samuel closes early on Wednesdays."

"I know it. Go on, please—

"I have some matters to discuss alone with you, and they may take a considerable time. Kindly let me know by return if the date suggested is inconvenient."

"That will do." He held out his hand for the paper, and signed it, "Yours truly, John Rosewarne," while the clerk addressed the envelope. This concluded their day's work.

Rosewarne pulled out his watch, consulted it, and fell again to staring out of the open window. A climbing Banksia rose overgrew the sill and ran up the mullions, its clusters of nankeen buds stirred by the breeze and nodding against the pale sunset sky. Beyond the garden lay a small orchard fringed with elms; and below this the slope fell so steeply down to the harbour that the elm-tops concealed its shipping and all but the chimney-smoke of a busy little

town on its farther shore. High over this smoke the rooks were trailing westward and homeward.

Rosewarne heard the clank of mallets in a ship-building yard below. Then five o'clock struck from the church tower across the water, and the mallets ceased; but far down by the harbour's mouth the crew of a foreign-bound ship sang at the windlass—

Good-bye, fare-ye-well—Good-bye, fare-ye-well!

The vessel belonged to him. He controlled most of the shipping and a good half of the harbour's trade. As for the town at his feet, had you examined his ledgers you might fancy its smoke ascending to him as incense. He sat with his strong hand resting on the arms of his chair, with the last gold of daylight touching his white hair and the lines of his firm, clean-shaven face, and overlooked his local world and his possessions. If they brought him happiness, he did not smile.

He aroused himself with a kind of shake of the shoulders, and stretched out a hand to ring, as his custom was after the day's work, for a draught of cider.

"Eh? Anything more?" he asked; for the little clerk, having gathered up his papers, had advanced close to the corner of the writing-table, and waited there with an air of apology.

"I beg your pardon, sir—the 28th of May. I had no opportunity this morning, but if I may take the liberty"—

"My birthday, Benny? So it is; and, begad, I believe you're the only soul to remember it. Stay a moment"—

He rang the bell, and ordered the maidservant to bring in a full jug of cider and two glasses. At the signal, a small Italian greyhound, who had been awaiting it, came forward fawning from her lair in the corner, and, encouraged by a snap of the fingers, leapt up to her master's knee.

"May God send you many, sir, and His mercy follow you all your days!" said little Mr. Benny, with sudden fervour. Relapsing at once into his ordinary manner, he produced a scrap of paper and tendered it shyly. "If you will think it appropriate," he explained.

"The usual compliment? Hand it over, man." Mr. Rosewarne took the paper and read—

> "Another year, another milestone past;
> Dear Sir, I hope it will not be the last:
> But more I hope that, when the road is trod,
> You find the Inn, and sit you down with God."

"Thank you, Benny. Your own composition?"

"I ventured to consult my brother, sir. The idea —if I may so call it—was mine, however."

Mr. Rosewarne leant forward, and picking up a pen, docketed the paper with the day of the month and the year. He then pulled out a drawer on the left-hand side of his knee-hole table, selected a packet labelled "Complimentary, P. B."—his clerk's initials—slipped the new verses under the elastic band containing similar contributions of twenty years, replaced the packet, and shut the drawer. The little greyhound, displaced by these operations, sprang again to his knees, and he fell to fondling her ears.

"I do not think there will be many more miles, Benny," said he, reaching for the cider-jug. "But let us drink to the rest of the way."

"A great many, I hope, sir," remonstrated Mr. Benny. "And, sir—talking about milestones—you will be pleased to hear that Mrs. Benny was confined this morning. A fine boy."

"That must be the ninth at least."

"The eleventh, sir—six girls and five boys: besides three buried."

"Good Lord!"

"They bring their love with them, sir, as the saying is."

"And as the saying also is, Benny, it would be more to the purpose if they brought their boots and shoes. Man, you must have a nerve, to trust Providence as you do!"

"It's a struggle, sir, as you can guess; but except to your kindness in employing me, I am beholden to no man. I say it humbly—the Lord has been kind to me."

Rosewarne looked up for a moment and with a curious eagerness, as though on the point of putting a question. He suppressed it, however.

"It seems to me," he said slowly, "in this question of many children or few there's a natural conflict between the private man and the citizen; yes, that's how I put it—a natural conflict. I don't believe in Malthus or any talk about over-population. A nation can't breed too many sons. Sons are her strength, and if she is to whip her rivals it will be by the big battalions. Therefore, as I argue it out, a good citizen should beget many children. But now turn to the private side of it. A man wants to do the best for his own; and whatever his income, he can do better for two children than for half a dozen. To be sure, he mayn't turn 'em out as he intended"—

Here Rosewarne paused for a while unwittingly, as his eyes fell on the packet of letters in Mr. Benny's hand. The uppermost—the business letter which he had just signed—was addressed to his only son.

"—but all the same," he went on, "he has fitted them out and given them a better chance in the strug-

gle for life. The devil takes the hindmost in this world, Benny. I'd like to lend you a book of Darwin's—the biggest book of this century, and a new gospel for the next to think out. The conclusion is that the spoils go to the strongest. You may help a man for the use you can make of him, but in the end every man's your natural enemy."

"A terrible gospel, sir! I shall have to get along with the old one, which says, 'Bear ye one another's burdens.' "

"I won't lend you the book. 'Twouldn't be fair to a man of your age, with eleven children. And after all, as I said, the new gospel has a place for patriots. They breed the raw material by which a nation crushes all rivals; then, when the fighting is over, along comes your man with money and a trained wit, and collars the spoils."

Mr. Benny stood shuffling his weight from one foot to the other. "Even if yours were the last word in this world, sir, there's another to reckon with."

"And meanwhile you're on pins and needles to be off to your wife's bedside. Very well, man—drink up your cider; and many thanks for your good wishes!"

As Mr. Benny hurried toward the wicket-gate and the street leading down to the ferry, he caught sight, across the hedge, of two children seated together in

a corner of the garden on the step of a summer arbour, and paused to wave a hand to them.

They were a girl and a boy—the girl about eight years old and the boy a year or so younger—and the pair were occupied in making a garland such as children carry about on May-morning—two barrel-hoops fixed crosswise and mounted on a pole. The girl had laid the pole across her lap, and was binding the hoops with ferns and wild hyacinths, wallflowers, and garden tulips, talking the while with the boy, who bent his head close by hers and seemed to peer into the flowers. But in fact he was blind.

"You're late!" the girl called to Mr. Benny. At the sound of her voice, the boy too waved a hand to him.

"It's your grandfather's birthday, and I've been drinking his health." He beckoned them over to the hedge. "And it's another person's birthday," he announced mysteriously.

"Bless the man! you don't tell me you've gone and got another!" exclaimed the girl.

Mr. Benny nodded, no whit abashed.

"Boy or girl?"

"Boy."

"What is he like?" asked the boy. His blindness came from some defect of the optic nerve, and did not affect the beauty of his eyes, which were curiously

reflective (as though they looked inwards), and in colour a deep violet-grey.

"I hadn't much time to take stock of him this morning," Mr. Benny confessed; "but the doctor said he was a fine one." He nodded at the garland. "Birthday present for your grandfather?" he asked.

"Grandfather doesn't bother himself about us," the girl answered. "Besides, what would he do with it?"

"I know — I know. It's better be unmannerly than troublesome, as they say; and you'd like to please him, but feel too shy to offer it. That's like me. I had it on my tongue just now to ask him to stand godfather—the child's birthday being the same as his own. 'Twas the honour of it I wanted; but like as not (thought I) he'll set it down that I'm fishing for something else, and when it didn't strike him to offer I felt I couldn't mention it."

"*I'll* ask him, if you like."

"Not on any account! No, please, you mustn't! Promise me."

"Very well."

"I oughtn't to have mentioned it, but"— Mr. Benny rubbed the back of his head. "You don't know how it is—no, of course you wouldn't; somehow, when a child's born, I want to be talking all day."

"Like a hen. Well, run along home, and some day you shall ask us to tea with it."

But Mr. Benny had reached the wicket. It slammed behind him, and he ran down the street to the ferry at a round trot. He might have spared his haste, for he had to cool his heels for a good ten minutes on the slipway, and fill up the time in telling his news to half a dozen workmen gathered there and awaiting the boat. Old Nicky Vro, the ferryman, had pulled the same leisurable stroke for forty years now, and was not to be hurried.

The workmen were carpenters, all engaged upon the new schoolhouse above the hill, and returning from their day's job. They discussed the building as Nicky Vro tided them over. Its fittings, they agreed, were something out of the common.

"'Tis the old man's whim," said one. "He's all for education now, and the latest improvements. 'Capability'—that's his word."

"A poor lookout it'll be for Aunt Butson and her Infant School."

"He'll offer her the new place, maybe," it was suggested.

But all laughed at this. "What? with his notions? He's a darned sight more likely to offer her Nicky's job, here!"

Nicky smiled complacently, in his half-witted way.

"That's a joke, too," said he. He knew himself to be necessary to the ferry.

He pulled on—still with the same digging stroke which he could not have altered for a fortune—while his passengers discussed Rosewarne and Rosewarne's ways.

"'Tis a hungry gleaning where he've a-reaped," said the man who had spoken of capability; "but I don't blame the old Greek—not I. 'Do or be done, miss doing and be done for'—that's the world's motto nowadays; and if I hadn't learnt it for myself, I've a son in America to write it home. Here we be all in a heap, and the lucky one levers himself a-top."

Mr. Benny said good-night to them on the landing-slip, and broke into a trot for home.

"'Tisn't true," he kept repeating to himself, almost fiercely for so mild a little man. "'Tisn't true, whatever it sounds. There's another world; and in this one—don't I *know* it?—there's love, love, love!"

CHAPTER II

FATHERS AND CHILDREN

John Rosewarne fetched his hat and staff from the hall, and started on his customary stroll around the farm-buildings, with the small greyhound trotting daintily at his heels.

The lands of Hall march with those of far larger estate, to which they once belonged, and of which Hall itself had once been the chief seat. The house—a grey stone building with two wings and a heavy porch midway between them—dated from 1592, and had received its shape of a capital E in compliment to Queen Elizabeth. King Charles himself had lodged in it for a day during the Civil War, and while inspecting the guns on a terraced walk above the harbour, had narrowly escaped a shot fired across from the town where Essex's troops lay in force. The shot killed a poor fisherman beside him, and His Majesty that afternoon gave thanks for his own preservation in the private chapel of Hall. In those days, the porch and all the main windows looked seaward upon this chapel across half an acre of

greensward; but the Rosewarnes had since converted the lawn into a farmyard and the shrine into a cow-byre. Above it ran a line of tall elms screening a lane used by the farm-carts, and above this again a great field of arable rounded itself against the sky.

From the top of Parc-an-hal—so the field was named—the eye travelled over a goodly prospect: sea and harbour; wide stretches of cultivated land, intersected by sunken woodlands which marked the winding creeks of the river; other woodlands yet more distant, embowering the great mansion of Damelioc; the purple rise of a down capped by a monument commemorating ancient battles. The scene held old and deeply written meanings for Rosewarne, as he gazed over it in the descending twilight—meanings he had spent his life to acquire, and other meanings born with him in his blood.

Once upon a time there lived a wicked nobleman. He owned Damelioc, and had also for his pleasure the house and estate of Hall, whence his family had moved to their lordlier mansion two generations before his birth. Being exiled to the country from the Court of Queen Anne, he cast about for some civilised way of passing the time, and one day, as he lounged at church in his great pew, his eye fell on Rachel Rosewarne, a gipsy-looking girl, sitting under

the gallery. This Rachel's father was a fisherman, tall of stature, who planted himself one night in the road as my lord galloped homeward to Damelioc. The horse shied, and the rider was thrown. Rosewarne picked him up, dusted his lace coat carefully, and led him aside into this very field of Parc-an-hal. No one knows what talk they held there, but on his lordship's dying, in 1712, of wounds received in a duel in Hyde Park, Rachel Rosewarne produced a deed, which the widow's lawyers did not contest, and entered Hall as its mistress, with her son Charles—then five years old.

Rachel Rosewarne died in 1760 at the age of seventy-six, leaving a grim reputation, which survived for another hundred years in the talk of the countryside. While she lived, her grip on the estate never relaxed. Her son grew up a mere hind upon the home-farm. When he reached twenty-five, she saddled her grey horse, rode over to Looe, and returned with a maid for him—one of the Mayows, a pale, submissive creature—whom he duly married. She made the young couple no allowance, but kept them at Hall as her pensioners. In the year 1747, Charles (by this time a man of forty) had the temerity to get religion from the Rev. John Wesley. The great preacher had assembled a crowd on the green by the cross-roads beyond Parc-an-hal. Charles

Rosewarne, who was stalling the cattle after milking-time, heard the outcries, and strolled up the road to look. Two hours later he returned, fell on his knees in the outer kitchen, and began to wrestle for his soul, the farm-maids standing around and crying with fright. But half an hour later his mother returned from Liskeard market, strode into the kitchen in her riding-skirt, and took him by the collar. "You base-born mongrel!" she called out. "You barn-straw whelp! what has the Lord to do with one of your breed?" She dragged him to his feet and laid her horse-whip over head and shoulders. Madam had more than once used that whip upon an idling labourer in the fields.

She died, leaving the estate in good order and clear of debt. Charles Rosewarne enjoyed his inheritance just eleven years, and, dying in 1771 of *angina pectoris*, left two married daughters and a son, Nicholas, on whom the estate was entailed, subject to a small annual charge for maintaining his mother.

In this Nicholas all the family passions broke out afresh. He had been the one living creature for whom Madam Rachel's flinty breast had nursed a spark of love, and at fourteen he had rewarded her by trying to set fire to her skirts as she dosed in her chair. At nineteen, in a fit of drunkenness, he struck his father. He married a tap-room girl from St.

Austell, and beat her. She gave him two sons: the elder (named Nicholas, after his father), a gentle boy, very bony in limb, after the fashion of the Rosewarnes; the younger, Michael, an epileptic. His mother had been turned out of doors one night in a north-westerly gale, and had lain till morning in a cold pew of the disused chapel, whereby the child came to birth prematurely. This happened in 1771, the year that Nicholas took possession of the estate. He treated his old mother even worse, being fierce with her because of the small annual charge. She grew blind and demented toward the end, and was given a room in the west wing, over the counting-house. Nicholas removed the door-handle on the inside, and the wainscot there still showed a dull smear, rubbed by the poor creature's shoulder as she trotted round and round; also marks upon the door, where her fingers had grabbled for the missing handle. There were dreadful legends of this Nicholas—one in particular of a dark foreigner who had been landed, heavily ironed, from a passing ship, and had found hospitality at Hall. The ship (so the story went) was a pirate, and the man so monstrously wicked that even her crew could not endure him. During his sojourn the cards and drink were going at Hall night and day, and every night found Nicholas mad-drunk. He began to mortgage, and whis-

pers went abroad of worse ways of meeting his losses; of ships lured upon the rocks, and half-drowned sailors knocked upon the head, or chopped at with axes.

All this came to an end in the great thunderstorm of 1778, when the harvesters, running for shelter to the kitchen, found Nicholas lying in the middle of the floor with his mouth twisted and eyeballs staring. They were lifting the body, when a cry from the women fetched them to the windows, in time to catch a glimpse of the foreigner sneaking away under cover of the low west wall. As he broke into a run the lightning flashed upon the corners of a brass-bound box he carried under his arm. One or two gave chase, but the rain met them on the outer threshold in a deluge, and in the blind confusion of it he made off, nor was seen again.

Thus died Nicholas Rosewarne, and was followed to the grave by one mourner only—his epileptic child, Michael. The heir, Nicholas II., had taken the king's shilling to be quit of his home, and was out in Philadelphia, fighting under Sir Henry Clinton. He returned in 1780 with a shattered knee-pan and a young wife he had married abroad. She died within a year of her arrival at Hall in giving birth to a son, who was christened Martin.

The loss of her and the ruinous state of the family finances completely broke the spirit of this younger

Nicholas. He dismissed the servants and worked in the fields and gardens about his fine house as a common market gardener. On fair-days at Liskeard or St. Austell the ex-soldier, prematurely aged, might have been seen in the market-place, standing as nearly at "Attention" as his knee-pan allowed beside a specimen apple tree, which he held to his shoulder like a musket. Thus he kept sentry-go against hard Fortune—a tall man with a patient face. Thanks to a natural gift for gardening, and the rare fertility of the slopes below Hall, he managed to pay interest on the mortgages and support the family at home—his sad-browed mother, his brother Michael, and his son Martin. And he lived to taste his reward, for his son Martin had a financial genius.

This genius awoke in Martin Rosewarne one Sunday, in his fifteenth year as he sat beside his father in the family pew and listened to a dull sermon on the Parable of the Talents. He was a just child, and he could not understand the crime of that servant who had hidden his talent in a napkin. In fault he must be, for the Bible said so.

The boy spent that afternoon in an apple-loft of the deserted chapel, and by evening he had hit on a discovery which, new in those days, now informs the whole of commerce—that it is more profitable to trade on borrowed capital than upon one's own.

He put it thus: "Let me, not knowing the meaning of a 'talent,' put it at £100. Now, if the good and faithful servant adventured five talents, or £500, at ten per cent., he made £50 a year. But if the servant with one talent can borrow four others, he has the same capital of £500. Suppose him to borrow at five per cent. and make ten like the other, he pays £20 of his profit in interest, and has thirty per cent. left on the talent he started with."

"Father," said the boy that night at supper, "what ought the wicked servant to have done with his talent?"

"Parson told you that plain enough, if you'd a-been listening."

"But what do *you* think?"

"I don't need to think when the Bible tells me. 'Thou wicked and slothful servant,' it says, 'thou oughtest to have put my money to the exchangers, and then I should have received mine own with usury.'"

"That means he ought to have lent it?"

"Yes, sure."

"Well, now," said the boy, nodding, "*I* think he ought to have borrowed."

Nicholas stared at his son gloomily. "Setting yourself up agen' the Scriptures, hey? It's time you were a-bed."

"But, father"—

The ex-soldier seldom gave way to passion, but now he banged his fist down on the table. "Go to bed!" he shouted. "Talk to *me* of borrowing! Don't my shoulders ache wi' the curse of it?"

Martin took his discovery off and nursed it. By and by another grew out of it: If the wicked servant be making thirty per cent. against the other's ten, he can afford for a time to abate some of his profit, lower his prices, and, by underselling, drive the other out of the market.

He grew up a tall and taciturn lad, pondering his thoughts while he dug and planted with his father in the kitchen-gardens. For this from the age of eighteen he received a small wage, which he carefully put aside. Then in 1800 his uncle Michael died, and left him a legacy of £50. He invested it in the privateering trade, in which the harbour did a brisk business just then. Three years later his father suffered a stroke of paralysis—a slight one, but it confined him to his room for some weeks. Meanwhile, Martin took charge.

"I've been looking into your accounts," he announced one day, as soon as his father could bear talking to.

"Then you've been taking an infernal liberty."

"I see you've cleared off two of the mortgages—

on the home estate here and the Nanscawne property. You're making, one way and another, close on £500 a year, half of which goes to paying up interest and reducing the principal by degrees."

"That's about it."

"And to my knowledge three of your tenants are making from £200 to £400 by growing corn, which you might grow yourself. Was ever such folly? Look at the price corn is making."

"Look at the labour. How can I afford it?"

"By borrowing again on the uncumbered property."

"Your old lidden again? I take my oath I'll never raise a penny on Hall so long as I live! With blood and sweat I've paid off that mortgage, and I'll set my curse on you if you renew it when I'm gone."

"We'll try the other, then. Your father raised £1500 on the Nanscawne lands, and spent it on cards and ropery. We'll raise the same money, and double it in three years. If we don't—well, I've made £500 of my own, and I'll engage to hand you over every farthing of it."

"Well," his father gave in, "gain or loss, it will fall on you, and pretty soon. I wasn't built for a long span; my father's sins have made life bitter to me, and I thank God the end's near. But if you have £500 to spare, I can't see why you drive me afield to borrow."

"To teach you a lesson, perhaps. As soon as you're fit for it, we'll drive over to Damelioc, and have a try with the new owner. He'll jump at us. The two properties went together once, and when he hears our tale, he'll say to himself, 'Oho! here's a chance to get 'em together again.' He'll think, of course, that you are in difficulties. But mind you stand out, and don't you pay more than five per cent."

Here it must be explained that the great Damelioc estates, after passing through several hands, had come in 1801 to an Irishman, a Mr. Eustatius Burke, who had made no small part of his fortune by voting for the Union. Mr. Burke, as Martin rightly guessed, would have given something more than the value of Hall to add it to Damelioc; and so, when Nicholas Rosewarne drove over and petitioned for a loan of £1500, he lent with alacrity. He knew enough of the situation to be thoroughly deceived. After Nanscawne, he would reach his hand out upon Hall itself. He lent the sum at five per cent., and dreamed of an early foreclosure.

Armed with ready money, the two Rosewarnes called in the leases of their fields, hired labourers, sowed corn, harvested, and sold at war prices. They bought land—still upon mortgage—on the other side of the harbour, and at the close of the great year 1812 (when the price of wheat soared far above £6 a quar-

ter) Nicholas Rosewarne died a moderately rich man. By this time Martin had started a victualling yard in the town, a shipbuilding yard, and an emporium near the Barbican, Plymouth, where he purveyed ships' stores and slop-clothing for merchant seamen. He made money, too, as agent for most of the smuggling companies along the coast, although he embarked little of his own wealth in the business, and never assisted in an actual run of the goods. He had ceased to borrow actively now, for other people's money came to him unsought, to be used.

The Rosewarnes, as large employers of labour, paid away considerable sums weekly in wages. But those were times of paper money. All coin was scarce, and in some villages a piece of gold would not be seen in a twelvemonth. Martin and his father paid for labour in part by orders on their own shops; for the rest, and at first for convenience rather than profit, they set up a bank and issued their own notes —those for one or two pounds payable at their own house, and those for larger sums by their London agent. At first these notes would be cashed at once. By and by they began to pass as ordinary tender. Before long, people who possessed a heap of this paper learnt that the Rosewarnes would give them interest for it as well as for money, and bethought them that, if hoarded, it ran the risk of robbery, besides

being unproductive. Timidly and at long intervals men came to Martin and asked him to take charge of their wealth. He agreed, of course. "Use the money of others" was still his motto. So Rosewarne's became a deposit bank.

To the end Nicholas imperfectly understood these operations. By a clause in his will he begged his son as a favour to pay off every penny of mortgage money. On the morning after the funeral, Martin stuffed three stout rolls of bank-notes into his pocket, and rode over to Damelioc. Mr. Burke had for six years been Lord Killiow, in the peerage of Ireland, and for two years a Privy Councillor. He received Martin affably. He recognised that this yeoman-looking fellow had been too clever for him, and bore no malice.

"I've a proposition to make to you, Rosewarne," said he, as he signed the receipts. "You are a vastly clever man, and I judge you to be trustworthy. For my part, I hate lawyers"—

"Amen!" put in Martin.

"And I thought of asking you to act as my steward at a salary. It won't take up a great deal of your time," urged his lordship; for Martin had walked to the long window, and stood there, gazing out over the park, with his hands clasped beneath his coat-tails.

"As for that, I've time to spare," answered Mar-

tin. "Banking's the easiest business in the world. When it's hard, it's wrong. But would you give me a free hand?"

"I cannot bind my brother Patrick, if that's what you mean. When I'm in the grave he must act according to his folly. If he chooses to dismiss you"—

"I'll chance that. But you are asking a good deal of me. Your brother is an incurable gambler. He owes something like £20,000 at this moment—money borrowed mainly on *post obits.*"

"You are well posted."

"I have reason to be. Man—my lord, I mean—he will want money, and what's to prevent me adding Damelioc to Hall, as you would have added Hall to Damelioc?"

"There's the boy, Rosewarne. I can tie up the estate on the boy."

Martin Rosewarne smiled. "Your brother's is a good boy," he said. "You can tie up the money with him. Or you may make me steward, and I'll give you my word he shall not be ousted."

Eustatius, first Lord Killiow, died in 1822, and his brother, Patrick Henry, succeeded to the title and estates. Martin Rosewarne retained his stewardship. To be sure he made an obliging steward. He saw that the man must go his own gait, and also that

he was drinking himself to death. So where a timid treasurer would have closed the purse-strings, he unloosed them. He cut down timber, he raised mortgages as soon as asked—all to hasten the end. Thus encouraged, the second Lord Killiow ran his constitution to a standstill, and succumbed in 1832. The heir was at that time an undergraduate at Christchurch, Oxford, and already the author of a treatise of one hundred and fifty pages on *The Limits of the Human Intelligence.* On leaving the University he put on a white hat and buff waistcoat, and made violent speeches against the Reform Bill. Later, he sobered down into a "philosophic" Radical; became Commissioner of Works; married an actress in London, Polly Wilkins by name; and died a year later, in 1850, at Rome, of malarial fever, leaving no heir. Lady Killiow—whom we shall meet—buried him decently, and returned to spend the rest of her days in seclusion at Damelioc, committing all business to her steward, John Rosewarne.

For Martin Rosewarne had taken to wife in 1814 a yeoman's daughter from the Meneage district, west of Falmouth, and the issue of that marriage was a daughter, who grew up to marry a ship's captain, against her parents' wishes, and a son, John, whom his father had set himself to train in his own ideas of business.

In intellect the boy inherited his father's strength, if something less than his originality. But in temper, as well as in size of frame and limb, he threatened at first to be a throw-back to Nicholas, his great-grandfather of evil memory. All that his father could teach he learnt aptly. But his passions were his own, and from fifteen to eighteen a devil seemed to possess the lad. He had no sooner mastered the banking business than he flatly refused to cross the bank's threshold. For two years he dissipated all his early promise in hunting, horse-breaking, wrestling at fairs, prize-fighting, drinking, gaming, sparking. Then, on a day after a furious quarrel at home, he disappeared, and for another three years his parents had never a word of him.

It was rumoured afterwards that he had enlisted, following his grandfather's example, and had spent at least some part of these wander-years as private in a West India regiment. At any rate, one fine morning in 1838 he returned, bringing with him a wife and an infant son, and it appeared that somehow he had exorcised, or at least chained, his devil. He settled down quietly at Hall, where meanwhile business had been prospering, and where now it put forth new vigour.

It was John who foresaw the decline in agriculture, and turned his father's attention from wheat-

growing to mining. He opened up the granite and china-clay on the moorland beyond the town, and a railway line to bring these and other minerals down to the coast. He built ships, and in times of depression he bought them up, and made them pay good interest on their low prices. He bought up the seaboats for miles along the coast, and took the pilchard-fishery into his hands. Regularly in the early spring a fleet sailed for the Mediterranean with fish for the Spaniards and Italians to eat during Lent. Larger ships—tall three-masters—took emigrants to America, and returned with timber for his building-yards, mines, and clay-works. The banking business had been sold by his father not long before the great panic of 1825.

In this same year 1825 John lost his first wife. After a short interval he sought and found a second —this time a lady of good family on the shores of the Tamar. She bore him a daughter, Anne, who grew up to make an unhappy match, and died untimely. The children at play in the garden were hers. Her mother survived her five years.

As men count prosperity, John Rosewarne had lived prosperously. He had a philosophy, too, to steel him against the blows of fate, and behind his philosophy a great natural courage. Nevertheless, as

he gazed across his acres for the last time—knowing well that it might be the last—and across them to Damelioc, the wider acres of his stewardship, his eyes for one weak moment grew dim. He had reached the stile at the summit of Parc-an-hal, and was leaning there, when he felt a cool, damp touch upon his fingers. The little greyhound, puzzled at his standing there so long motionless, had reached up on her hind legs, and was licking his hand affectionately.

He frowned, pushed her off, and started to descend the hill. Night was falling fast, with a heavy dew. The children had left their play and crept to bed. They never sought him to say good-night.

He returned slowly, leaning on his staff, went to his room, lit the lamp, and spent a couple of hours with his papers. This had become his nightly habit of late.

On Wednesday he arose early, packed a hand-bag, crossed the ferry, and took train for Plymouth.

CHAPTER III

ROSEWARNE'S PILGRIMAGE

FROM the railway station at Plymouth John Rosewarne walked straight to Lockyer Street, to a house with a brass plate on the door, and on the brass plate the name of a physician famous throughout the West of England.

The doctor had just come to the end of his morning consultations, and received Rosewarne at once. The pair talked for five minutes on indifferent matters, then of Paris, and the terrible doings of the Commune—for this was the month of May 1871. At length Rosewarne stood up.

"Best get it over," said he.

The doctor felt his pulse, took the stethoscope and listened, tapped and sounded him, back and chest, then listened again.

"Worse?" asked Rosewarne.

"It is worse," answered the doctor gravely.

"I knew it. One or two in my family have died in the same way. The pains are sharper of late, and more frequent."

"You keep that little phial handy?"

Rosewarne showed where it lay, close at hand in his watch-pocket.

"How long?" he asked.

"A few months, perhaps." The doctor seemed to hesitate.

"And you won't answer for *that?*"

"With care. It is folly for a man like you to be overworking."

Rosewarne laughed grimly. "You're right there, and I've often enough asked myself why I do it. To what end, good Lord! But I'm taking no care, all the same. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my friend." The doctor did not remonstrate further. He knew his man.

From Lockyer Street Rosewarne walked to his hotel, ordered a beef-steak and a pint of champagne, and lunched leisurably. Lunch over, he lit a cigar, and strolled in the direction of the Barbican. The streets were full of holiday-keepers, and he counted a dozen brakes full of workers pouring out of town to breathe the air of Dartmoor on this fine afternoon. He himself was conscious of elation.

"I'll drink it regularly," he muttered to himself. "It's hard if a man with maybe a month more to live cannot afford himself champagne."

The air in Southside Street differed from that of

Dartmoor, being stuffy, not to say malodorous. He rapped on the door of a dingy office, and it was opened by his son, Mr. Samuel Rosewarne.

"How d'ye do, Sam?" he nodded, not offering to shake hands. "All alone? That's right. I hope, by the way, I'm not depriving you of a holiday?"

"I seldom take a holiday," Mr. Sam answered.

The old man eyed him ironically. Mr. Sam wore a black suit, with some show of dingy white shirt-front, relieved by a wisp of black cravat and two onyx studs. His coat-cuffs were long and frayed, and his elastic-side boots creaked as he led the way to the office.

In the office the old man came to business at once. "First of all," said he, with a nod toward the safe, "I'd like a glance into your books."

"Certainly, sir," answered Mr. Sam, after a moment's hesitation. He unlocked the safe. "Do you wish to take the books in order? You will find it a long business."

"Man, I don't propose to audit your accounts. If you let me pick and choose, half an hour will tell me all I want."

Well knowing that his son detested the smell of tobacco, he pulled out another cigar and lit it. "You can open the window," said he, "if you prefer the smell of your street. Is this the pass-book?"

For about three-quarters of an hour he ransacked the ledgers, tracking casual entries from one to another apparently at random. His fingers raced through the pages. Now and again he looked up to put a sharp question; and paused, drumming on the table while Mr. Sam explained. Once he said, "Bad debt? Not a bit; the man was right enough, if you had made inquiries."

"I *did* make inquiries."

"Ay, into his balance. So you pinched him at the wrong moment, and pinched out ninepence in the pound. Why the devil couldn't you have learnt something of the *man? He* was all right. If you'd done that, you might have recovered every penny, earned his gratitude, and done dashed good business."

He shut the ledger with a slam. "Lock 'em up," he commanded, lighting a fresh cigar, "and come up to the Hoe for a stroll. Where the deuce did you pick up that hat?"

"Bankrupt stock."

"I thought so. Maybe you've invested in a full suit of mourning for *me*, at the same time?"

"No, sir."

"Why not? The books are all right. You've no range. Still, within your scope you're efficient. You'll get to your goal, such as it is. You wear a hat that makes me ill, but in some way you and your

hat will represent the survival of the fittest. What's the boy like?"

"He ails at times, sir—being without a mother's care. I am having him privately instructed. He has some youthful stirrings toward grace."

Old Rosewarne swung round at a standstill. "Grace?" he echoed, for the moment supposing it the name of a girl. Then perceiving his mistake, he broke out into a short laugh; but the laugh ended bitterly, and his face twitched with pain.

"Look here, Sam; I'm going to leave you the money. Don't stare—and don't, I beg, madden me with your thanks"—

"I'm sure, sir"—

"You'll get it because I can't help myself. There's your half-sister's children at home; but of what use to me is a girl or a blind boy? You are narrow—narrow as the grave: but I find that, like the grave, you are inevitable; and, like the grave, you keep what you get. For the kind of finance that was the true game of manhood to your grandfather and me, you have no capacity whatever. No, I cannot explain. Finance? Why, you haven't even a *sense* of it. Yet in a way you are capable. You will make the money yield interest, and will keep the race going. That is what I look to—you will keep the race going. Now I want to speak about

that boy of yours. Do me the only favour I have ever asked you—send him to a public school, and afterwards to college, and let him have his fling."

Sam thought his father must have gone mad. "What, sir! After all you have said of such places! 'Dens of idleness,' 'sinks of iniquity'—I have heard you scores of times!"

"I spoke as a fool. 'Twas my punishment, perhaps, to believe it; but, Lord!"—he eyed his son up and down—"to think my punishment should take this form!" He caught Sam's arm suddenly and wheeled him about in face of a glass shop-front. "Man, look at yourself! Make the boy something different from *that!* Do what I'd have done for you if ever you had given me a chance. Turn him loose among gentlemen; don't be afraid if he idles and wastes money; let him riot out his youth if he will—he'll be learning all the time, learning something you don't know how to teach, and maybe when his purse is emptied he'll come back to you a gentleman. I tell you there's no difference in the world like that between a gentleman and a man who's not a gentleman. Money can't buy it; and, after the start, money can't change or hide it. The thing is there, or it isn't."

"Whatever the thing is," said Sam sullenly, "you are asking me to peril my son's soul for it."

They had reached the Hoe by this time. John Rosewarne dropped upon a bench and sat resting both hands on his staff and gazing over the twinkling waters of the Sound.

"Anne married a gentleman," pursued Sam.

"Ay, and a rake. A-ah!" muttered the old man after a moment, drawing a long breath, "if only that boy of hers weren't blind! But he doesn't carry the name, while *you*"— He broke off with a savage laugh. "What's that you said a moment ago?—something about immortal souls."

"I said there's a world beyond this, and"—

"Is there? That's what I'm concerned to know, just now. And *you?* What are you proposing to do when you get there?" He withdrew his eyes from the bright seascape and let them travel slowly over his son. "*You!* sitting there like a blot on God's sunshine! By what right should you expect another world, who have cut such a figure in this one? I have known love and lust, and drink and hard work and hard fighting; I have been down in the depths, and again I have known moments to make a man smack his hands together for joy to be alive and doing. But you? What kind of man are you, you son of mine? What do you live for? Why did you marry? And what did you and your poor woman find to talk about?"

Whatever bullying Sam suffered, he had his revenge in this—that he and no other man could exasperate his father to weakness. He rubbed his thin side whiskers now and muttered something about "an acceptable sacrifice."

The old man jabbed viciously at the gravel with his staff. "And your religion?" he broke forth again. "What is it? In some secret way it satisfies you—but how? I look into the Bible, and I find that the whole of religion rests on a man's giving himself away to help others. I don't believe in it myself; I believe in the exact contrary. Still there the thing is, set out in black and white. It upsets law and soldiering and nine-tenths of men's doings in trade: to me it's folly; but so it stands, honest as daylight. When did *you* help a man down on his luck? or forgive your debtor? You'll get my money because you never did aught of the kind. Yet somehow you're a Christian, and prate of your mean life as an acceptable sacrifice. In my belief you're a Christian precisely because Christianity—how you work it out I don't know—will give you a sanction for any dirty trick that comes in your way. When good feeling, or even common honour, denies you, there's always a text somewhere to oil your conscience."

"I've one, sir, on which I can rely—'Be just, and fear not.'"

"I'll test it. You'll have my money; on which you hardly dared to count, eh? Be honest."

"Only on so much of it as is entailed, sir."

For a while John Rosewarne sat silent, with his eyes on the horizon.

"That," said he at length, "is just what you could not count on." He turned and looked Sam squarely in the face. "You were born out of wedlock, my son."

Sam's hand gripped the iron arm of the bench. The muscles of his face scarcely moved, but its sallow tint changed, under his father's eyes, to a sickly drab.

"Ay," pursued the old man, "I am sorry for you at this moment; but you mustn't look for apologies and repentance and that sort of thing. The fact is, I never could feel about it in that way. I was young and fairly wild, and it happened. One doesn't think of possible injury to someone who doesn't yet exist. But that, I grant you, doesn't make it any the less an injury. Now what have you to say?"

"The sins of the fathers"—

"—are visited on the children: quite so. Afterwards we did our best, and married. No one knows; no one has ever guessed; and the proof would be hard to trace. In case of accident, I give you Port Royal for a clue."

Sam rose and stood for a moment staring gloom-

ily down on the gravel. "Why did you tell me, then?" he broke out. "What need was there to tell?"

His father winced, for the first time. "I see your point. Why didn't I, you ask, having played the game so far, play it out? Why couldn't I take my secret with me into the last darkness, and be judged for it—my own sole sin and complete? Well, but there's the blind child. By law the house and home estate would be his. I might have kept silence, to be sure, and let him be robbed; but somehow I couldn't. I've a conscience somewhere, I suppose."

"Have you?" Sam flamed out, with sudden spirit. "A nice sort of conscience it must be! I call it cowardice, this dragging me in to help you compensate the child. Conscience? If you had one, you wouldn't be shifting the responsibility on to mine."

"You are mistaken," said his father calmly. "And, by the way, I advise you not to take that tone with me. It may all be very proper under the circumstances; but there's the simple fact that I won't stand it. You're mistaken," he repeated. "I mean to settle the compensation alone, without consulting you; though, by George! if 'tweren't for pitying the poor child, I'd like to leave it to you as a religious man, and watch you developing your reasons for giving him nothing."

"And it was you," muttered Sam, with a kind of stony wonder, "who advised me just now to let my son run wild!"

"I did, and I do." John Rosewarne stood up and gripped his staff. "By the way, too," he said, "your mother was a good woman."

"I don't want to hear anything about it."

"I know; but I wanted to tell you. Good-bye."

He turned abruptly and went his way down the hill. As he went, his lips moved. He was talking not to himself, but to an unseen companion—

"Mary! Mary!—that this should be the fruit of our sowing!"

CHAPTER IV

ROSEWARNE'S PENANCE

Beside the winding Avon above Warwick bridge there stretches a flat meadow, along the brink of which on a summer evening you may often count a score of anglers seated and watching their floats; decent citizens of Warwick, with a sprinkling of redcoats from the garrison. They say that two-thirds of the Trappist brotherhood are ex-soldiers; and perhaps if we knew the reason we might also know why angling has a peculiar fascination for the military.

Angling was but a pretext, however, with a young corporal of the 6th Regiment, who sat a few yards away on John Rosewarne's right, and smoked his pipe, and cast frequent furtive glances, now along the river path, now back and across the meadow where another path led from the town. Each of these glances ended in a resentful stare at his too-near neighbour, who fished on unregarding.

"Is this a favourite corner of yours?" the corporal asked after a while, with meaning.

"I have fished on this exact spot for thirty-five

years," answered John Rosewarne, not lifting his eyes from the float.

The corporal whistled. "Thirty-five years! It's queer, now, that I never set eyes on you before—and I come here pretty often."

Rosewarne let a full minute go by before he answered again. "There's nothing queer about it, unless you've been stationed long in Warwick."

"Best part of a year."

"Quite so: I fish in Avon once a year only."

"Belong to the town?"

"No; nor within two hundred miles of it."

"You must think better of the sport than I do, to come all that distance."

John Rosewarne lifted his eyes for the first time and turned them upon the young man.

"*What* sport?" he asked.

"Eh? Why, fishing, to be sure. What else?" stammered the corporal, taken aback.

"Tut!" said the old man curtly. "Here she comes. Now, what are you going to do?"

Without waiting for an answer, he bent his gaze on the float again, and kept it fastened there, as a pretty shop-girl came strolling along the river path. She had taken off her hat, of broad-brimmed straw with artificial poppies and cornflowers, and swung it in her hand as she came. Her eyes roamed

the landscape carelessly, avoiding only that particular spot where the corporal, as she approached, scrambled to his feet; then, her start of surprise was admirable.

"Oh, it's *you!* Good-evening."

"Good-evening, miss."

"Why, whoever—! It seems to me you spend most of your time fishing."

She paused, gathering in her skirt a little—and this obviously was the cue for a gallant soldier. The corporal began, indeed, to wind up his line, but with a foolish grin and a glance at Rosewarne's back.

"It keeps beautiful weather," he answered at length.

"*I* call it sultry." She held out her hat with a little deprecating laugh. "I took it off for the sake of fresh air," she explained. Then, as he stood stock-still, a flush crept up her cheek to her pretty forehead.

"Well, good-evening; I won't interrupt you by talking," she said, and began to move away.

"Come to think of it, it *do* look like thunder," the corporal remarked to Rosewarne, staring after her and then up at the sky.

"If you had eyes in your head, you'd have seen that without her telling you. That cloud yonder has been rising against the wind for an hour. Look you

along the bank, how every man Jack is unjointing his rod and making for home. Go, and leave me in peace!"

He did not turn his head even when the corporal, having packed together his gear, wished him good-night and hurried after the print frock as it vanished in the twilit shadows. One or two of the departing anglers paused as they went by to promise him that a storm was imminent and the fish had ceased feeding. He thanked them, yet sat on—solitary, in the leaden dusk.

The scene he had just witnessed—how it called up the irremediable past, with all the memories which had drawn him hither, summer after summer! And yet how common it was and minutely unimportant! Nightly by the banks of Avon couples had been courting—thousands in these thirty-five years—each of them dreaming, poor fools, that their moment's passion held the world in its hands. But the world teemed with rivers ten times lordlier than Avon—rivers stretching out in an endless map, with bridges on which lovers met and whispered, with banks down which they went with linked arms into the shadows—

"Were I but young for thee, as I hae been,
We should hae been gallopin' doun in yon green,
And linkin' it owre the lily-white lea—
And wow gin I were but young for thee!"

He had been young, and had loved and wronged a woman, and bitterly repented. He had married her, and marriage had killed neither love nor remorse. The woman was dead long since: he had married again, but never forgotten her nor ceased to repent. She, a petty tradesman's daughter of Warwick, had collected her savings and taken ship for the West Indies, trusting to his word, facing a winter's passage in the sole hope that he would right her. Until the day of embarking she had never seen the sea; and the sea, after buffeting her to the verge of death, in the end betrayed her. A gale delayed the ship, and in the height of it her child was born. Rosewarne, a private soldier, went to his captain as soon as she was landed, made a clean breast of it, and married her. But it was too late. She lived to return with him to England; but he knew well enough when she died that her sufferings on the passage out, and the abiding anguish of her shame, had killed her. A common tale! Men and women still go the way of their instinct, by which the race survives. "All the rivers run into the sea, and yet the sea is not full. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done."

A tale as common as sunset! Yet upon all rivers and upon every bridge and willow-walk along their

courses the indifferent sun shines for each pair of fools with a difference, lighting their passion with a separate flame. The woman was dead; and he—he that had been young—sat face to face with death.

He leaned forward, oblivious of the clouded dusk, with his half-shut eyes watching the grey gleam of the river; but his mind's eye saw the shadowy mead behind him, and a girlish figure crossing it with feet that seemed to faint, holding her back from doom, yet to be impelled against their will.

They drew nearer. He heard their step, and faced about with a start. An actual woman stood there on the river path, most like in the dusk to that other of thirty-five years ago; but whereas *she* had worn a print frock, this one was clad in total black.

"Mr. Rosewarne"— she began; but her words came to a halt, checked by a near flash of lightning and by what it revealed.

He was in the act of rising—had risen, in fact, on one knee—when a spasm of pain took him, and his hand went up to his breast. For a moment he knelt so, turning on her a face of anguish; then sank and dropped in a heap at her feet.

Quick as thought she was down on her knees beside him, and, slipping an arm beneath his head, drew it upon her lap. While with swift fingers she loosened his collar and neckcloth, a peal of thunder rumbled

out, and the first large raindrops fell splashing on her hand. She recalled that last gesture of his, and with sudden inspiration searched in his breast-pocket, found and drew out a small phial, uncorked it, and forced the liquid between his teeth before they clenched in a second spasm. Two or three sharp flashes followed the first. In the glare of them her eyes searched along the river-bank, if haply help might be near; but all the anglers had departed. Rosewarne's face stared up at her, blue as a dead man's in the dazzling light. At first it seemed to twitch with each opening of the heavens; but this must have been a trick of eyesight, for his head lay quiet against her arm as she raised him a little, shielding him against the torrential rain which now hissed down, in ten seconds drenching her to the skin, blotting out river and meadow in a sheet of grey. It forced her to stoop her shoulders, and, so covering him, she put out a hand and laid it over his heart. Yes, it beat, though feebly. Once more she picked up the phial and gave him to drink, and in a little while he stirred feebly and found his voice.

"Rain? Is it rain?" he muttered.

"Yes; but I can spread my skirt over you. It will keep off a little. Are you better?"

"Better? Yes, better. Let me feel the rain—it does me good." He lay silent for a minute or so.

"I shall be right again in a few minutes. Did you find the phial?"

"Yes."

"Good girl. It was touch and go." By and by he made a movement to sit up. "Let us get home quickly. You can throw the rod into the river. I shan't want it again."

But she stood up, and, groping for the rod, drew the float ashore and untackled it, still in the hissing rain. The storm, after a brief lull, had redoubled its rage. The darkness opened and shut as with a rapidly moving slide, the white battlements of Cæsar's Tower gleaming and vanishing above the castle elms, and reappearing while their fierce candour yet blinded the eye. The thunder-peals, blending, wrapped Warwick as with one roar of artillery. Rosewarne had risen, and stood panting. He grasped her shoulder. "Come!" he commanded. The girl, dazzled by the lightning, puzzled by his sudden renewal of strength, turned and peered at him. He declined her arm. They walked back across the sodden meadow to the town, over the roofs of which, as the storm passed away northward, the lightning yet glimmered at intervals, turning the gaslights to a dirty orange.

At the summit of the High Street, hard by the Leycester Hospital, they came to the doorway of a

small shuttered shop, over which by the light of a street lamp one could read the legend, "J. MARVIN, SECOND-HAND BOOKSELLER." The girl opened the door with a latchkey. An oil lamp burned in an office at the back of the shop—if that can be spoken of as a separate room which was, in fact, entirely walled off with books laid flat and rising in stacks from the floor. The place, in fact, suggested a cave or den rather than a shop, with stalagmites of piled literature and a subtle pervading odour of dust and decayed leather. The girl, after shutting the bolts behind her, led the way cautiously, and, crossing a passage at the rear of the shop, opened a door upon a far more cheerful scene. Here, in a neat parlour hung with old prints and mezzotints and water-colours, a hanging lamp shed its rays on a china bowl heaped with Warwickshire roses, and on a white cloth and a table spread for supper.

"H'm!" grunted Rosewarne, glancing in through the doorway, while she lit a candle for him at the foot of the stairs. "Your father and I used to sup in the kitchen, with old Selina to wait on us."

"But since there is no longer any Selina! I had to pension her off, poor old soul, and she is gone to the almshouse."

She handed him the light.

"Now, if you will go up to your room, I will

fetch the hot water, and then you must give me your change of clothes. They shall be warmed for a few minutes at the kitchen fire, and you shall have them hot-and-hot."

"It seems to me that while all this is doing, you will stand an excellent chance of rheumatic fever."

"Oh, I shall be all right," she announced cheerfully. "No—don't look at me, please. I know very well that the dye has run out of these crapes, and my face is beautifully streaked with black! Can you walk upstairs alone? Very well. And if you feel another attack coming, you are to call me at once."

She must have been expeditious; for when he came downstairs again he found her awaiting him in the parlour, clad in a frock of duffel-grey, which, with her damp, closely plaited hair, gave her a Quakerish look. Yet the frock became her; the natural wave of her hair, defying moisture, showed here and there rebelliously, and her cheeks glowed after a vigorous towelling.

Rosewarne drew from under his coat a bottle of champagne, and set it on the table, where the lamp's ray fell full on its gold foil. Her eyes opened wide; for he had always visited this house in his oldest clothes and passed for a poor man.

"Since you insist upon the parlour," said he, "I must try to live up to it." He produced a knife from

his pocket, with a pair of nippers, and began to cut the wire. "Why are you wearing grey?" he demanded.

She flushed. "This is my school frock. I have only one suit of mourning as yet."

"And you sent away Selina. You wanted money, I suppose?"

"No," she answered, after a moment, meeting his eyes frankly; "at least, not in the way you mean. The doctor's bills were heavy, and for years father had done business enough to keep the roof over him and no more. So at first there was—well, a pinch. The books will sell, of course; two honest men are already bidding for them—one at Birmingham and the other at Bristol. But meanwhile I must pinch a little or run in debt. I hate debt."

"And afterwards?" Rosewarne broke off sharply, with a glance around the table. "But, excuse me, you have laid for one only."

"If it is your pleasure, Mr. Rosewarne"—

"Say that I claim it as an honour, Miss Hester," he answered, with a mock-serious bow.

She laughed, and ran off to the pantry.

"And afterwards?" he resumed, as they seated themselves.

"Afterwards? Oh, I go back to the teaching. I like it, you know."

He brimmed her glass with champagne, then filled his own. "You saved my life just now, Miss Hester; and life is good to look forward to, even when a very little remains. I drink to your happiness."

"Thank you, sir."

"How old are you?"

"I shall be twenty-five in August."

"And how long have you been teaching?"

"Eight years."

"Ah! is it eight years since I came and missed you? I remember, the last time we three supped together—you and your father and I—I remember taking note of you, and telling myself, 'She will be married before I return next year.' Why haven't you married?"

It was the essence of Hester Marvin's charm that she dealt straightly with all people.

"It takes two to make even that quarrel," she answered, frankly and gaily. "Will you believe that nobody has ever asked me?"

"Make light of it if you will, but I bid you to beware. You were a good-looking missie, and you have grown—yes, one can say it without making you simper—into a more than good-looking woman. But the days slip by, child, and your looks will slip away with them. You are wasting your life in worrying over other folks' children. Those eyes of yours were

meant for children of your own. What's more, you are muddling the world's work. Which do you teach, now—boys or girls?"

"Girls for the most part; but I have a class of small boys."

"And what do you teach 'em—I mean, as the first and most important thing?"

Hester knit her brows for a moment before answering. "Well, I suppose, to be honourable to one another and gentle to their sisters."

"Just so. In other words, you relieve a mother of her proper duty. Who but a mother ought to teach a boy those things, if he's ever to learn 'em? That's what I call muddling the world's work. By the time a boy gets to school he ought to be ripe for a harder lesson, and learn that life's a fight in which brains and toil bring a man to the top. As for girls, one-half of present-day teaching is time and money thrown away. Teach 'em to be wives and mothers —to sew and cook"—

"Does your supper displease you, Mr. Rosewarne?"

He set down knife and fork with a comical stare around the board.

"Eh? No—but did you really—?"

Their eyes met, and they both broke into a laugh.

"I should very much like to know," said Hes-

ter, resting her elbows on the table and gazing at him over her folded hands, "if *you* have treated life as a fight in which men get the better of their neighbours."

He eyed her with sudden, sharp suspicion.

"You have at any rate a woman's curiosity," said he. "When you wrote to me that your father was dead, but that I might have, for the last time, my usual lodging here, had you any reason to suppose me a rich man?"

"I think," answered Hester slowly, after a pause, "that I must have spoken so as to hurt you somehow. If so, I am sorry; but you must hear now just why I wrote. I knew that, ever since I was born, and long before, you had come once a year and lodged here for a night. I knew that you came because my father was the parish clerk and let you spend the night in St. Mary's Church; and I know that, though he allowed it secretly, you did no harm there, else he would never have allowed it. Now he is dead, and meanwhile I keep the keys by the parson's wish until a new parish clerk is appointed. And so I wrote, thinking to serve you for one year more as my father had served you for many."

"I thank you, Miss Hester, and I beg your pardon. Yet there is a question I need to ask, though you may very properly refuse to answer it. Beyond

my name and address and my yearly visits, what do you know of me?"

"Nothing at all."

"You must have wondered why I should do this strange thing, year by year?"

"To wonder is not to be inquisitive. Of course I have wondered; but I supposed that you came to strengthen yourself in some purpose, or to keep alive a memory—of someone dear to you, perhaps. Into what has brought you to us year after year I have no wish at all to pry. But there is a look on your face—and when children come to me with that look they are unhappy with some secret, and want to be understood without having to tell all particulars. A schoolmistress gets to know that look, and recognises it sometimes in grown-up folk, even in quite old persons. Yes, and there is another look on your face. You are not strong enough to go alone to the church to-night, and you know it."

"I am going, I tell you."

He had pushed back his chair, and answered her, after a long pause, during which he watched her removing the cloth.

"To-morrow you may have recovered; but to-night you are faint from that attack. If you really must go, will you not let me go too, and take my promise neither to look nor to listen?"

"Get me the key," he commanded, and walked obstinately to the door. But there his strength betrayed him. He put out a hand against the jamb. "I am no better than a child," he groaned, and turned weakly to her. "Come if you will, girl. There is nothing to see, nothing to overhear."

She fetched cloak and bonnet and found the great keys. He and she stepped out by a back entrance upon a lane leading to the church. The storm had passed. Aloft, in a clear space of the sky, the moon rode and a few stars shone down whitely, as if with freshly washed faces. Hester carried a dark lantern under her cloak; but, within, the church was light enough for Rosewarne to grope his way to his accustomed pew. Hester saw him take his seat there, and choosing a pew at some distance, in the shadow of the south aisle, dropped on her knees.

Nothing happened. The tall figure in the chancel sat motionless. Rosewarne did not even pray—since he did not believe in God. But because a woman, now long dead, had believed and had implored him to believe also, that they two might one day meet in heaven, he consecrated this night to her, sitting in the habitation of her faith, keeping his gaze upon that spot in the darkness where on a bright Sunday morning a young soldier had caught sight of her and met her eyes for the first time. Year after year he had

kept this vigil, concentrating his thought upon her and her faith; but never for an instant had that faith come near to touching him, except with a sentimental pity which he rejected, despising it; never had he come near to piercing the well of that mysterious comfort and releasing its waters. To him the dust of the great dead yonder in the Beauchamp Chapel —dust of men and women who had died in faith— was dust merely, arid, unbedewed by any promise of a life beyond. They had played their parts, and great tombs and canopies covered their final nothingness. This was the last time he would watch, and to-night he knew there was less chance than ever of any miracle; for weariness weighed on him, and the thought of coming annihilation held no terror, but only an invitation to be at rest.

From the tower overhead the airy chimes floated over Warwick, beating out a homely tune to mingle with homely dreams. He sat on, nor stirred.

The June dawn broke, with the twittering of birds in the churchyard. He stood up and stretched himself, with a frown for the painted windows with their unreal saints and martyrs. His footsteps as he walked down the aisle did not arouse the girl, who slept in the corner of the pew, with her loosened hair pencilling, as the dawn touched it, lines of red-gold

light upon the dark panels. Her face was pale, and sleep gave it a childlike beauty. He understood, as he stooped and touched her shoulder, why the apparition of her on the river-bank had so startled him.

"Come, child," he said; "the night is over."

CHAPTER V

THE CLOSE OF A STEWARDSHIP

A STRANGE impatience haunted Rosewarne on his homeward journey; an almost intolerable longing to arrive and get something over—he scarcely knew what. When at length he stood on the ferry slipway, with but a furlong or two of water between him and home, the very tranquillity of the scene irritated him subtly—the slow strength of the evening tide, the few ships idle at their moorings, the familiar hush of the town resting after its day's business. He tapped his foot on the cobbles as though this fretful action could quicken Uncle Nicky Vro, who came rowing across deliberately as ever, working his boat down the farther shore and then allowing the tide to slant it upstream to the landing-place.

"Eh? So 'tis you?" was Nicky's greeting. "Well, and I hope that you've enjoyed your holiday—not that I know, for my part, what a holiday means."

"It's time you took one, then," Rosewarne answered.

The old man chuckled. "Pretty things would happen if I did! 'Took a day off, one time, to marry my old woman, and another to bury her, and that's all in five-and-forty year. Not a day's sickness in all that time, thank the Lord!"

Rosewarne watched the old fellow's feeble digging stroke. "I preach capability," he said to himself, "and this is the sort of thing I allow!" His gaze travelled from the oar to the oarsman. "You're getting past your work, all the same," he said aloud. "What does it feel like?"

"Eh?"

"To give up life little by little. Some men run till they drop—are still running strong, maybe, when the grave opens at their feet, and in they go. With you 'tis more like the crumbling of rotten timber: a little dribble of sawdust day by day to show where the worms are boring. What does it feel like?"

"I don't feel it at all," Nicky answered cheerfully. "Folks tell me from time to time that I'm getting past. My own opinion is, they're in a greater hurry to get to market than of yore. 'Competition'—that's a cry sprung up since my young days: it used to be 'Religion,' and 'Nicholas Vro,

be you a saved man?' The ferry must ply, week-day or Sabbath: I put it to you, What time have I got to be a saved man? The Lord is good, says I. Now I'll tell you a fancy of mine about Him. One day He'll come down to the slip calling 'Over!' and whiles I put Him across—scores of times I've a-seen myself doing it, and 'tis always in the cool of the evening after a spell of summer weather—He'll speak up like a gentleman, and ask, 'Nicholas Vro, how long have you been a-working this here boat?' 'Lord,' I'll answer, 'for maybe a matter of fifty year, calm or blow, week-days and Sabbaths alike; and that's the reason your Honour has missed me up to church, as you may have noticed.' 'You must be middlin' tired of it,' He'll say: and I shall answer up, 'Lord, if you say so, I don't contradict 'ee; but 'tis no bad billet for a man given to chat with his naybours and talk over the latest news and be sociable, and warning to leave don't come from me.' 'You'd best give me over they oars, all the same,' He'll say; and with that I shall hand 'em over and be rowed across to a better world."

Rosewarne was not listening. "Surely, man, the tide's slack enough by this time!" he interrupted, his irritation again overcoming him. "You needn't be fetching across sideways, like a crab."

Nicky rested on his oars, and stared at him for

a moment. As if Rosewarne or any man alive could teach *him* how to pull the ferry! He disdained to argue.

"Talking about news," said he, resuming his stroke, "the *Virtuous Lady* arrived yesterday, and began to unload this morning. You can see her top-m'sts down yonder, over the town quay."

"Has Mrs. Purchase been ashore?" Mrs. Purchase was Rosewarne's only sister, who had married a merchant skipper and sailed with him ever since in the *Virtuous Lady*, in which she held a preponderance of the shares.

"Came ashore this very afternoon in a bonnet as large as St. Paul's, with two-thirds of a great humming-bird a-top. She's balancing up the freight accounts at this moment with Peter Benny. Indeed, master, you'll find a plenty of folk have been inquiring for 'ee. There's the parson for one. To my knowledge he've been down three times to ask when you'd be back, and if you'd forgotten the School Managers' meeting, that's fixed for to-morrow." Uncle Nicky brought his boat at length to shore. "And there's Aun' Butson in terror that you'll be bringing in some stranger to teach the children, and at her door half the day listening for your footstep, to petition 'ee."

Somehow Rosewarne had promised himself that

the restlessness would leave him as soon as he reached his own side of the water. He stepped ashore and began to walk up the slipway at a brisk pace; and then on a sudden his brain harked backward to Uncle Nicky's talk, to which a minute before he had listened so inattentively. In his hurry he had let an opportunity pass. The old man had talked of death; had been on the point of saying something important, perhaps—for all that concerned death and men's views of death had become important now. He halted and turned irresolutely. But the moment had gone by.

"Good-night!" he called back, and resumed his way up the village street.

Uncle Nicky, bending to replace a worn tholepin with a new one, dropped the pair with a clatter. In all his experience Rosewarne had never before flung him a salutation.

"And a minute ago trying to tell me how to work the ferry!" the old man muttered, staring after him. "The man must be ailing."

As a hunted deer puts the water between him and the hounds, Rosewarne had hoped to shake off his worry at the ferry-crossing. But no; it dogged him yet as he mounted the hill. Only, as a dreamer may suffer the horror of nightmare, yet know all the while that it is a dream, he felt the impatience and

knew it for a vain thing. All his life he had been hurrying desperately, and all his life the true moments had offered themselves and been left ungrasped.

Before the doorway of a cottage halfway up the hill an old woman waited to intercept him—Aunt Butson, the village schoolmistress. She was a spinster well over sixty, and lodged with a widow woman, Sarah Trevarthen, to whom the cottage belonged.

Rosewarne frowned at the sight of her. She wore her best cap and shawl, and her cheeks were flushed. Behind her in the doorway sat a young sailor, with a cage on the ground beside him and a parrot perched on his forefinger close against his cheek. He glanced up with a shy, very good-natured smile, touched his forelock to Rosewarne, and went on whispering to the bird.

Aunt Butson stepped out into the roadway. "Good-evening, Mr. Rosewarne, and glad to see you back and in health!" She dropped him a curtsey. "If you've a minute to spare, sir"—

Confound the woman!—he had no minutes to spare. Still frowning, he looked over her head at the young sailor, Sarah Trevarthen's boy Tom, home from his Baltic voyage in the *Virtuous Lady*. Yes, it was Tom Trevarthen, now a man grown. Rose-

warne remembered him as a child in frocks, tumbling about the roadway; as an urchin straddling a stick; as a lad home (with this same parrot) from his first voyage. Who, in a world moving at such a pace, could have a minute to spare?

Aunt Butson had plunged into her petition, and was voluble. It concerned the new schools, of course. "She had taught reading, writing, and ciphering for close on forty years. All the children in the village, and nine-tenths of their parents for that matter, owed their education to her. A little she could do, too, in navigation—as Mr. Rosewarne well knew: enough to prepare a lad for Schoolmaster Penrose across the water. Mr. Penrose would rather teach two boys from her school than one from any other parish. Surely—surely—the new Board wouldn't take the bread out of an old woman's mouth and drive her to the workhouse? She didn't believe, as some did, in this new-fangled education, and wouldn't pretend to. Arithmetic up to practice-sums and good writing and spelling—anything up to five syllables—were education enough to her mind for any child that knew his station in life. The rest of it only bred Radicals. Still, let her have a trial at least; let them decide to-morrow to give her a chance; 'twould be no more than neighbourly. Her ways might be old-fashioned; but she could

learn. And with Mrs. Trevarthen to keep the grand new schoolroom dusted—if they would give her the job—and look after the fires and lighting"—

Rosewarne pretended to listen. The poor soul was inefficient, and he knew it: beneath all her flow of speech ran an undercurrent of wrath against the new learning and all its works. Poverty—sheer terror of a dwindling cupboard and the workhouse to follow—drove her to plead with that which she hated worse than the plague. He heard, and all the while his mind was miles away from her petition; for some chance word or words let fall by her had seemed for an instant to offer him a clue. Somewhere in the past these words had made part of a phrase or sentence which, could he but find it again, would resolve all this brooding trouble. He searched his memory—in vain; the words drew together like dancers in a figure, and then, on the edge of combining, fell apart and were lost.

Aloud he kept saying, "You mustn't count on it. Some provision will be made for you, no doubt—in these days one must march with the times." This was all the comfort she could win from him, and the poor old creature gazed after him forlornly when at length he broke from her and went his way up the hill.

He reached the entrance-gate. As it clashed behind him, two children at play in the garden lifted their heads. The girl whispered to the boy, and the pair stole away out of sight. From the porch the small greyhound caught sight of him, and, bounding to him, fawned about his feet. In the counting-house he found his sister closeted with Mr. Benny, and a pile of bills on the table between. Mrs. Purchase rose and greeted him with a little pecking kiss. She was a cheerful body, by some five or six years his junior, with a handsome, weather-tanned face, eyes wrinkled at the corners like a seaman's, and two troubles in the world—the first being that she had borne no children. She shared her husband's voyaging, kept the ship's accounts, was known to all on board as "The Bos'un," and when battened under hatches in foul weather spent her time in trimming and retrimming the most wonderful bonnets. Her coquetry stopped short at bonnets. To-day indeed—the weather being warm—in lieu of bodice she had slipped on a grey alpaca coat of her husband's.

"Good-evening, John!" She plunged at once into a narrative of the passage home—how they had picked up a slant off Heligoland and carried it with them well past the Wight; how on this side of Portland they had met with slight and baffling head-winds, and for two days had done little more than

drift with the tides. The vessel was foul with weed, and must go into dock. "You could graze a cow on her for a fortnight," Mrs. Purchase declared. "Benny and I have just finished checking the bills. You'd like to run through them?"

"Let be," said Rosewarne. "I'll cast an eye over them to-night maybe." He stepped to the bell-rope and rang for his jug of cider.

Some touch of fatigue in the movement, some slight greyness in his face, caught Mrs. Purchase's sisterly eye.

"It's my belief you're unwell, John."

"Weary, my dear Hannah—weary; that's all." He turned to the little clerk. "That will do for to-night, Benny. You can leave all the papers as they are, just putting these bills together in a heap. Is that the correspondence? Very well; I'll deal with it."

"In all my life I never heard you own to feeling tired," persisted Mrs. Purchase, as Mr. Benny closed the door behind him. "You may take my word for it, you're unwell; been sleeping in some damp bed, belike."

Rosewarne moved to the window and gazed out across the garden. Down by the yew-hedge, where a narrow path of turf wound in and out among beds of tall Madonna lilies and Canterbury bells, the

two children were playing a solemn game of follow-my-leader, the blind boy close on his sister's heels, she turning again and again to watch that he came to no harm.

"I wonder if that boy could be trained and made fit for something?" mused Rosewarne aloud.

"Eh? Is it Clem?" She had followed and stood now by his elbow. "My dear man, he has the brains of the family! Leave Myra to teach him for a while. See how she's teaching him now, although she doesn't know it; and that goes on from morning to night."

"Where's the use of it? What's a blind man, at the best?"

"What God means him to be. If God means him to do better—ay, or to see clearer—than other men, 'tisn't a pair of darkened eyes will prevent it."

"Woman's argument, Hannah. I take you on your own ground—God could cure the child's eyes; but God doesn't, you see. On the contrary, God chose to blind 'em. If I'd your religion, it would teach me that Clem's misfortune was a punishment designed—the sins of the fathers"—

"Ay, you're a hard man, like your father and mine. Haven't I cause to know it? Hadn't *she* cause to know it—the mother of that pretty pair?"

"She made her bed."

"—And lies in it, poor soul. But I tell you, John, there's a worse blindness than Clem's, and you and father have suffered from it. I mean the blindness of thinking you know God's business so much better than God that you take it out of His hands. 'Punishment,' you say, and 'sins of the fathers'? I'd have you beware how you visit the past on poor Clem, or happen you may find some day that out of the sins of his fathers you have chosen your own to lay on him."

Rosewarne turned on her with a harsh glance of suspicion. No, her eyes were candid—she had spoken so by chance—she did not guess.

Had he been blind all his life? It was certain that now at the last his eyes saw the world differently, and all things in it. Those children, yonder—a hundred times from this window he had watched them at play without heeding. To-night they moved against the dark yew-hedge like figures in a toy theatre, withdrawn within a shadowy world of their own, celebrating a ritual in which he had no concern. The same instant revealed their beauty and removed them beyond his reach. Did he wish to make amends? He could not tell. He only knew it was too late. The world was slipping away from him—these children with it—dissolving into the shadow that climbed about him.

Next morning he saddled his horse and rode. His way led him past the new school-buildings; and he reined up for a minute, while his eyes dwelt on them with a certain pride. As chairman of the new School Board he had chosen the architect, supervised the plans, and seen to it that the contractor used none but the best material. The school would compare with any in the Duchy, and should have a teacher worthy of it—one to open the children's eyes and proclaim and inculcate the doctrine of progress. John Rosewarne was a patriot in his unemotional way. He hated the drift of the rural population into the towns, foreseeing that it sapped the strength of England. He despised it too; his own experience telling him that a countryman might amass wealth if he had brains and used them. As for the brainless herd, they should be kept on the land at all cost, to grow strong, breed strong children, and, when the inevitable hour came, be used as fighters to defend England's wealth.

He rode on pondering, past uplands where the larks sang and the mowers whetted their scythes; down between honeysuckle-hedges to a small village glassing itself in the head waters of a creek, asleep, since all its grown inhabitants had climbed the hill to toil in the hay-harvest, and silent but for a few clucking fowls and a murmur of voices within the

infants' school; thence across a bridge, and up and along a winding valley to the park gates at Damelioc. Beyond these the valley narrowed to a sylvan gorge, and the speckless carriage-road mounted under forest trees alongside a river tumbling in miniature cascades, swirling under mossy foot-bridges, here and there artfully delayed to form a trout-pool, or as artfully veiled by thickets of trailing wild roses and Traveller's Joy. For a mile and more he rode upward under soft green shadows, then lifted his eyes to wide daylight as the coombe opened suddenly upon a noble home-park, smooth as a lawn, rising in waves among the folds of the hills to a high plateau whence Damelioc House looked seaward—a house of wide prospect and in aspect stately, classical in plan, magnificently filling the eye with its bold straight lines and ample symmetries prolonged in terraces and rows of statues interset with pointed yews.

The mistress of this palace gave him audience as usual in her blue-and-white morning-room, from the ceiling of which, from the centre of a painting, "The Nuptials of Venus and Vulcan," her own youthful face smiled down, her husband having for a whim instructed the painter to depict the goddess in her likeness. It smiled down now on a little shrunken lady huddled deep in an easy-chair. Only

her dark eyes kept some of their old expressiveness, and her voice an echo of its old full tone.

She asked Rosewarne a polite question or two concerning his holiday, and they fell at once to ordinary talk—of repairs, rents, game, and live-stock generally, the hiring of a couple of under-keepers, the likeliest tenant for a park-lodge which had fallen empty; of investments too, and the money market, since Rosewarne was her man of business as well as steward.

Lady Killiow trusted him absolutely; but only because she had long since proved him. He on his part yielded her the deepest respect, both for her sagacity in business and for the fine self-command with which she, an actress of obscure birth, had put the stage behind her, assumed her rank, and borne it through all these years with something more than adequacy. John Rosewarne, like a true Briton, venerated rank, and had a Briton's instinct for the behaviour proper to rank. About his mistress there could be no question. She was a great lady to the last drop of her blood.

His devotion to her had a touch of high chivalry. It came of long service; of pity for her early widowhood, for her childlessness, for the fate ordaining that all these great possessions must be inherited by strangers; but most of all it was coloured by a

memory of which he had never dared, and would never dare, to speak.

He had seen her on the stage. Once, in his wild days, and not long before he enlisted, he had spent a week in Plymouth, where she was acting, the one star in a touring company. Night after night she had laid a spell on him; it was not Rosalind, not Imogen, not Mrs. Haller, not Lady Teazle, that he watched from the pit; but one divine woman passing from avatar to avatar. So, when the last night revealed her as Lady Macbeth, as little could he condemn her of guilt as understand her remorse. He saw her suffering because for so splendid a creature nothing less could be decreed by the jealous gods. It tortured him; and when the officer announced her death, for the moment he could believe no less. "The queen, my lord, is dead." "She should have died hereafter." How well he remembered the words and Macbeth's reply—those two strokes upon the heart, strokes of a muffled bell following the outcry of women.

He was no reader of poetry. He had bought the book afterwards, and flung it away; it tangled him in words, but showed him nothing of the woman he sought.

Yet to-day, as he stood before Lady Killiow discussing the petty question of a lease, the scene and

words flashed upon him together, and he grasped the clue for which his brain had been searching yesterday while he listened to old Mrs. Butson. It was Lady Killiow who called the lease a "petty" one, and that word unlocked his memory. "This petty pace—

> "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time—
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death."

"I beg your pardon," said Lady Killiow, lifting her eyes to him in some astonishment—for he had muttered a word or two—and meeting his fixed stare. "You are not attending, I believe."

"Excuse me, my lady. It is true that I have not been well of late—and that reminds me: in case of illness, my son will post down from Plymouth. He holds himself ready at call. If I may say it, you will find him less of a fool than he looks."

Lady Killiow put up her hands with a little laugh, half comfortable, half wistful. "My good Mr. Rosewarne, I am a very old woman! In a short while you may do as you like; but until I am gone, please understand that you cannot possibly fall ill."

He bowed with a grave smile. Of his mistress's

grateful affection he took away these light words only: but they were enough.

He had thought by this visit to Damelioc to lay his demon of restlessness; had supposed this monthly account of his stewardship, punctually rendered, to be the business weighing on his mind. But no: as he passed out through the park gates, the imp perched itself again behind his crupper, urging him forward, tormenting him with the same vague sense of duty neglected and clamorous.

Towards evening it grew so nearly intolerable that he had much ado to sit patiently and preside at the School Board meeting, convened, as usual, in the great parlour at Hall. All the Board was there: the Clerk, Mr. Benny, and the six Managers; two Churchmen, three Dissenters, and himself—a Gallio with a casting vote. He was used to reflecting cynically that these opponents trusted him precisely because he cared less than a tinker's curse for their creeds, and reconciled all religious differences in a broad, impartial contempt. But to-night, as Parson Endicott approached the crucial difficulty—the choice of a new teacher—with all the wariness of a practised committee-man, laying his innocent parallels and bringing up his guns under cover of a pleasant disavowal to which the three Dissenters responded with "Hear, hear!"

John Rosewarne listened not at all, nor to the fence of debate that followed as Church and Dissent grew heated and their friction struck out the familiar sparks—"sectarian," "undoctrinal," "arrogance," "broad-mindedness." At length came the equally familiar pause, when the exhausted combatants turned by consent and waited on their chairman. He sat tapping his fingers upon the polished mahogany, watching the reflected candle-lights along its surface, wondering when these fretful voices would cease, these warring atoms release him to obey the summons of his soul—still incomprehensible, still urgent.

Their sudden hush recalled him with a start. He had heard nothing of their debate. Slowly he lifted his eyes and let them rest upon Mr. Benny, who sat on his right, patiently waiting to take down the next entry for the minutes.

"If you will trust me," he said, "I can find you a teacher—a woman—whom you will all accept."

He had spoken without premeditation, and paused now, doubtful of the sound of his own voice. The five Managers were looking at him with respectful attention. Apparently, then, he was speaking sense; and he spoke on, still wondering by what will (not his own) the words came.

"If you leave her and the children alone, I think

her religion will not trouble you. She is accustomed to boys, and teaches them to be honourable to one another and gentle to their sisters."

He paused again and drummed with his fingers on the table. He heard the voices break out again, and gathered that the majority assented. Mechanically he put the resolution, declared it carried, and closed the meeting; as mechanically he shook hands with all the Managers and wished them good-night. "And on your way, Benny, you may tell the maids they may go to bed. I'll blow out the candles myself."

When all had taken their leave he sat for a while, still staring at the reflected lights along the board. Then he arose and passed into his counting-house, where an oil lamp burned upon his writing-table.

He took pen and paper and wrote, addressed the letter, sealed it carefully, and leaned back in his chair, studying the address.

"There is to-morrow," he muttered. "I can reconsider it before post-time to-morrow."

But the restlessness had vanished and left in its stead a deep peace. If Death waited for him in the next room, he felt that he could go quietly now and take it by the hand. He remembered the candles still burning there, and stood up with a slight shiver—a characteristic shake of his broad shoulders. As he did so his eyes fell again upon the addressed

letter. He turned them slowly to the door—and there, between him and the lights on the long table, a vision moved towards him—the figure of a girl dressed all in black. His hand went up to the phial in his breast-pocket, but paused half-way as he gazed into the face and met her eyes. . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE RAFTERS

Two children came stealing downstairs in the early dawn, carrying their boots in their hands, whispering, lifting their faces as if listening for some sound to come from the upper floors. But the whole house kept silence.

Their plan was to escape by one of the windows on the ground floor. Tiptoeing along the hall to the door of the great parlour, Myra noiselessly lifted the latch (all the doors in the house had old-fashioned latches) and peeped in. The candles on the long table had burned themselves out, and the shuttered room lay in darkness save for one long glint of light along the mahogany table-top. It came from the half-open doorway in the far corner, beyond which, in the counting-house, a ghost of a flame yet trembled in Rosewarne's lamp.

Myra caught at Clem's arm and drew him back into the hall. For the moment terror overcame her —terror of something sinister within—of their grand-

father sitting there like Giant Pope in the story, waiting to catch them. She hurried Clem along to the kitchen-passage, which opened out of the hall at right angles to the front door and close beside it. The front door had a fanlight through which fell one broken sunray, filtered to a pale green by the honeysuckle of the porch; and reaching it, she caught her breath in a new alarm. The bolts were drawn.

After a furtive glance behind her, she peered more closely, holding Clem fast by the sleeve. Yes, certainly the bolts were drawn, and the key had not been turned in the lock. Very cautiously she tried the heavy latch. The door opened easily—though with a creak that fetched her heart into her mouth.

But there was no going back. Whatever might be the explanation of the unbolted door, they were free now, at large in the dewy morning with the world at their feet. The brightness of it dazzled Myra. It broke on Clem's ears with the dinning of innumerable birds.

They took hands and hurried down the gravel path. Did ever Madonna lilies, did ever clove carnations smell as did these, lifting their heads from their morning bath? Yet field challenged garden with the fragrance of new-mown hay wafted down through the elms from Parc-an-hal, that great meadow.

On the low wall by the garden gate Myra found

a seat for Clem, helped him to lace his boots, and then put on her own.

"What's the time?" Clem demanded.

"I don't know, but he'll be coming soon. It can't be four o'clock yet, or we should hear Jim Tregay knocking about the milk-pails."

The boy sat silent, nursing his knee, drinking in a thousand scents and sounds. Myra watched the great humble-bees staggering from flower to flower, blundering among their dew-filled cups. She drew down a lily-stem gently, and guided her brother's hand so that it held one heady fellow imprisoned, buzzing under his palm and tickling it. Clem laughed aloud.

"Listen!"

A lad came whistling up the road from the village. It was Tom Trevarthen, and the sunshine glinted on his silver earrings.

"Good-morning, missy! Good-morning, Master Clem! I'm good as my word, you see; though be sure I never reckoned to find 'ee up and out at this hour."

"Myra woke me," said Clem. "I believe she keeps a clock in her head."

"When I want to wake up at any particular hour, I just do it," Myra announced calmly. "Have they begun the rafting?"

"Bless your life, they've been working all night.

There's one raft finished, and the other ought to be ready in a couple or three hours, to save the tide across the bay."

"I don't hear them singing."

"'Tisn't allowed. The Bo—your Aunt Hannah, I mean—says she don't mind what happens to sea, but she won't have her nights in harbour disturbed. Old Billy Daddo hadn't laid hands on the first balk before he began to pipe, 'O for a thousand tongues to sing,' starting on the very first hymn in the collection like as if he meant to sing right through it. He hadn't got to 'music in the sinner's ears' before the old woman pushed her face overside by the starboard cathead, nightcap and all—in that time she must ha' nipped out of her berth, up the companion, and along the length of the deck—and says she, 'I ben't no sinner, William Daddo, but a staid woman that likes her sleep and means to have it.' 'Why, missus,' says Billy, 'you'll surely lev' a man ask a blessing on his labours!' 'Ask quiet then,' she says, 'or you'll get slops.' Since then they be all as mute as mice."

Myra took Clem's hand, and the three hurried down the hill and through the sleeping village to the ferry-slip, where Tom had a ship's boat ready. In fifty strokes he brought her alongside the barque where the rafters—twenty-five or thirty—were at

work, busy as flies. The *Virtuous Lady* had been towed up overnight from her first anchorage to a berth under Hall gardens, and a hatch opened in her bows, through which the long balks of timber were thrust by the stevedores at work in the hold and received by a gang outside, who floated them off to be laid raftwise and lashed together with chains. The sun, already working around to the south, gilded the barque's top-gallant masts and yards, and flung a stream of gold along the raft already finished and moored in midstream. But the great hull lay as yet in the cool shadow of the hillside over which the larks sang.

Tom Trevarthen found the children a corner on the half-finished raft, out of the way of the workmen, and a spare tarpaulin to keep their clothes dry; and there they sat happily, the boy listening and Myra explaining, until Mrs. Purchase, having slept her sleep and dressed herself (partly), emerged on deck with a teapot to fill at the cook's galley, and, looking over the bulwarks, caught sight of them.

"Hullo! You don't tell me that Susannah"—this was the housekeeper at Hall—"allows you abroad at this hour!"

Now the risk of Susannah's discovering their escape and pursuing was the one bitter drop in the cup of these truants' happiness. Susannah—a middle-

aged, ill-favoured spinster, daughter of a yeoman-farmer, with whose second wife she could not agree—scorned the sea and all sailors. Once, as a girl, she had committed her ample person to a sailing boat, and, thank God! that one lesson had been enough. Ships came and went under the windows of Hall, but in the children's eyes they and their crews belonged to an unknown world. Things real to them were the farm and farm stock, harvests and harvest-homes, the waggoners' teams, byres, orchards, garden, and cool dairy. Ships' captains arrived out of fairyland sometimes, and crossed the straw-littered townplace to hold audience with their grandfather; magic odours of hemp and pitch, magic chanty songs and clanking of windlasses called to them up the hill; but until this morning they had never dared to obey the call. Had Clem been as other boys— But, being blind, he trusted to Myra, and Myra was a girl.

"Come aboard and have a drink of something cordial!" continued Mrs. Purchase, holding the tea-pot aloft. She walked forward and looked down on the workers. "Now you may sing, boys, if 't pleases 'ee."

"Thank 'ee, ma'am," answered up Billy Daddo; "then lev' us make a start with Wrestling Jacob, Part Two.—

'Lame as I am, I take the prey'—

'tis a pleasant old tune and never comes amiss, but for choice o' seasons give me the dew o' the mornin'."

He pitched the note in high falsetto, and after a couple of bars five or six near comrades joined in together—

"Speak to me now, for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair :
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak ;
Be conquer'd by my instant prayer !
Speak, or thou never hence shall move,
And tell me if thy name is Love."

Billy Daddo's gang hailed from a parish, three miles up the coast, noted for containing "but one man that couldn't preach, and that was the parson." Their fellow-labourers—the crew of the barque and half-a-score longshoremen belonging to the port—heard without thought of deriding. Though themselves unconverted—for life in a town, especially in a seaport town, makes men curious and critical rather than intense, and life in a ship ruled by Mrs. Purchase did not encourage visionaries—they were accustomed to the fervours of the redeemed.

"'Tis Love ! 'tis Love ! thou diedst for me :
I hear thy whisper in my heart— !"

"Brayvo ! 'tis workin' ! 'tis workin' ! Give it tongue, brother Langman !" cried Billy, as a steve-

dore within the hold broke forth into a stentorian bass that made the ship rumble—

> "The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
> Pure universal Love thou art:
> To me, to me thy bowels move,
> Thy nature and thy name is Love!"

Meanwhile young Tom Trevarthen had brought the children under the vessel's side, and was helping Clem up the ladder. Mrs. Purchase greeted them with a kiss apiece, and carried them off to the cabin, where they found Mr. Purchase eating bread and cream.

Skipper Purchase, a smart seaman in his day and a first-class navigator, had for a year or two been gradually weakening in the head; a decline which his wife noted, though she kept her anxiety to herself. She foresaw with a pang the end of their voyaging, and watched him narrowly, having made a compact with herself to interfere before he imperilled the *Virtuous Lady*. Hitherto, however, his wits had unfailingly cleared to meet an emergency. While she could count upon this, she knew herself competent to rule the ship in all ordinary weather.

"Help yourselves to cream," said Mr. Purchase, after giving them good-morning. "Clever men tell me there's more nourishment in a pound o' cream than in an ox. Now that may seem marvellous in

your eyes?" He paused with a wavering, absent-minded smile. "'Tis the most nourishing food in the animal, vegetable, or mineral kingdoms, unless you count parsnips."

"T'cht!" his wife put in briskly, banging down a couple of clean teacups on the swing-table. "Children don't want a passel o' science in their insides. Milk or weak tea, my dears?"

"I don't know," the skipper went on after another long pause, bringing his uncertain eyes to bear on Clem, "if you've ever taken note what astonishing things folks used to eat in the Bible. There's locusts, and wild honey, and unleavened bread—I made out a list of oddments one time. Nebbycannezzar don't count, of course; but Ezekiel took down a whole book in the shape of a roll."

Mrs. Purchase signed to Myra to pay no heed, and engaged Clem in a sort of quick-firing catechism on the cabin fittings, their positions and uses. The boy, who had been on board but once in his life before, stretched out a hand and touched each article as she named it.

"The lamp, now?"

Clem reached up at once and laid his fingers on it, gently as a butterfly alights on a flower.

"How does it swing?"

"On gimbals."

"Eh? and what may gimbals be?"

"There's a ring fastened here"—the boy's fingers found it—"and swinging to and fro; and inside the ring is a bar, holding the lamp so that it tips to and fro crossways to the ring. You weight the bottom of the lamp, and then it keeps plumb upright however the ship moves."

"Wunnerful memory you've got, to be sure—and your gran'father tells me you can't even read!"

"But he knows his letters," Myra announced proudly; "and when the new teacher comes he's to go to school with me. Susannah says so."

"How in the world did you teach 'n his letters, child?"

"I cut them on the match-boarding inside the summer-house, and he traces them out with his fingers. If you go up you can see for yourself—the whole lot from A to Ampassy! He never makes a mistake—do you, Clem? And I've begun to cut out 'Our Father,' but it's slow work."

"Did ever you hear tell!" Mrs. Purchase turned to her husband, who had come out of his reverie and sat regarding Clem with something like lively interest. He had, in fact, opened his mouth to utter a scriptural quotation, but, checked on the verge of it, dropped back into pensiveness.

At this point Mrs. Purchase's practised ear told

her that the stevedores were ceasing work, and she bustled up the ladder to summon her crew to swab decks. The old man, left alone with the children, leaned forward, jerked a thumb after her, and said impressively, "I named her myself."

"Who? Aunt Hannah?" stammered Myra, taken aback.

"No, the ship. I named her after your aunt. 'Who can find a virtuous woman?' says Solomon. 'I can,' says I; and, what's more, I done it: only I changed the word to lady, as more becoming to one of her haveage. Proverbs thirty-one, fourteen—turn it up when you get home, and you'll find these words: 'She is like the merchant ships, she bringeth her food from afar.'"

"Uncle," put in Myra breathlessly, "I want you to listen for a moment. Clem and I have run away this morning, and by this time Susannah will have found it out and be searching. If she sends down here, couldn't you hide us—just for a little while? The—the fact is, we've set our hearts on going with the rafts. There's no danger in this weather, and Tom Trevarthen has promised to look after us. I don't dare to ask Aunt Hannah; but if you could have a boat ready just when the rafts are starting, and hide us somewhere till then"—

Mr. Purchase did not seem to hear, but rose and

opened a small Dutch corner-cupboard, inlaid with parrots and tulips, and darkly varnished. From it he took a large Bible.

"I'll show you the text I was speaking of."

"But, uncle"—

"They'm washing-down already," said he, lifting his head to the sound of rushing water on deck. "Your aunt will be back in a moment, and 'tis time for prayers."

Sure enough, at that instant the feet and ankles of Mrs. Purchase appeared on the ladder. "Tide's on the turn," she announced. "Keep your seats, my dears; the Lord knows there's no room to kneel, and He makes allowance." She set a small packed basket on the table, and turned to her husband. "You'll have to pray short, too, if the children are going with the rafts."

"Going?—Oh, Aunt Hannah!"

"Why, I'd a notion you *wanted* to. To be sure, if I'm wrong, I'm wrong, and 'tisn' the first time; but young Tom Trevarthen didn' seem to reckon so. There, get your prayers over and cut along; I'll make it all right with your grandfather and Susannah."

Ah, but it was bliss, and blissful to remember! The rafts dropped down past the town quay, past

the old block-houses, past the ivied fort at the harbour's mouth, and out to the open sea that twinkled for leagues under the faint northerly breeze, dazzling Myra's eyes. Tom Trevarthen grinned as he tugged at an enormous sweep with two other men, Methodists both, and sang with them and with Billy Daddo, who steered with another sweep, rigged aft upon a crutch—

> **"Praise ye the Lord! 'tis good to raise**
> **Your hearts and voices in His praise"—**

"Now what should put it in my noddle to take up with that old hemn?" asked Billy aloud, coming to a halt at the close of the first verse and scratching his head. "'Tidn' one of my first fav'rites—nothing in it about the Blood o' the Lamb—an' I can't call to mind havin' pitched it for years. Well, never mind! The Lord hev done it with some purpose, you may be sure."

"I call it a very pretty hymn," said Myra, for he seemed to be addressing her. "And isn't it reason enough that you're glad to be alive?"

"But I bain't," Billy argued, shaking his head. "You wouldn' understand it at your age, missy; but as a saved soul I counts the days. Long after I was a man grown, the very sound of 'He comes, He comes! the Judge severe,' or 'Terrible thought, shall I alone,'

used to put me all of a twitter. Now they be but weak meat, as you might say. 'Ah, lovely appearance of death'—that's more in my line—

"Ah, lovely appearance of death!
What sight upon earth is so fair?
Not all the gay pageants that breathe
Can with a dead body compare"—

"Don't!" Myra put both hands up to her ears. "Oh, please don't, Mr. Daddo! And I call it wicked to stand arguing when the Lord, as you say, put a cheerfuller tune in your head."

"Well, here goes, then!" Billy resumed "Praise ye the Lord." At the fifth verse his face began to kindle—

"What is the creature's skill or force?
The sprightly man, or warlike horse?
The piercing wit, the active limb,
Are all too mean delights to Him.
But saints are lovely in His sight,
He views His children with delight;
He sees their hope, He knows their fear,
And looks and loves His image there."

"Ay, now," he broke out, "to think I didn' remember that verse about children when I started to sing! And 'twas of you, missy, and the young master here the dear Lord was thinkin' all the time!"

He dropped his eyes and, leaning back against

the handle of the sweep, suddenly burst into prayer. "Suffer little children, O dear Jesus! suffer little children. Have mercy on these two tender lambs, and so bring them, blessed Lord, to Thy fold!"

As his fervour took hold of him he left the sweep to do its own steering, and strode up and down the raft, picking his way from balk to balk, skipping aside now and again as the water rose between them under his weight and overflowed his shoes. To Myra, unaccustomed to be prayed for aloud and by name, the whole performance was absurd and embarrassing. She blushed hotly under the eyes of the other men, and glanced at Clem, expecting him to be no less perturbed.

But Clem did not hear. The two children had taken off their boots, and he sat with the water playing over his naked insteps and his eyes turned southward to the horizon as if indeed he saw. With his blind gaze fastened there he seemed to wait patiently until Billy's prayer exhausted itself and Billy returned to the steering; and then his lips too began to move, and he broke into a curious song.

It frightened Myra, who had never heard the like of it; for it had no words, but was just a sing-song —a chant, low at first, then rising shrill and clear and strong, and reaching out as though to challenge the waters twinkling between raft and horizon.

Through it there ran a note of high courage touched with tremulous yearning—yearning to escape yonder and be free.

She touched his hand. So well she loved and understood him that even this strange outbreak she could interpret, though it caught her at unawares. For the moment he did not feel the touch; he was far away. He had forgotten her—alas!—with his blindness. She belonged to his weakness, not to his strength. For the while he dwelt in the vision of his true manhood, which only his one infirmity forbade his inheriting; and she had no place in it.

He came back to reality with a pitiful break and quaver of the voice, and turned his eyes helplessly towards her. She answered his gaze timidly, as though he could see her. She was searching his eyes for tears. But there was no trace of tears in them. He took the food she handed him from Aunt Purchase's basket; and, having eaten, laid his head in her lap and fell asleep.

Slowly under the noonday heat and through the long afternoon the two rafts moved across the bay, towing each its boat in which the rafters would return in the cool of the evening.

But the children did not return in them; for on the quay, where the balks were due, to be warped

ashore unlashed and conveyed inland to the mines, stood Jim Tregay waiting with their grandfather's blood-mare Actress harnessed in a spring-cart. How came Jim here, at this distance from home?

"Been waiting for you these two hours!" he called to the children. "Jump into the boat there and come ashore. You'm wanted at home, and to once!"

CHAPTER VII

THE HEIRS OF HALL

They landed and clambered into the spring-cart.

"Nothing wrong at home, I hope?" called Tom Trevarthen from the quay's edge, as he pushed off to scull back to the raft.

"Oh, this is Susannah's nonsense, you may be sure!" called back Myra. "I suppose she carried her tales to grandfather, and he packed you off after us, Jim Tregay? Well, you needn't look so glum about it. Aunt Hannah gave us leave, and told Tom to look after us, and we've had a heavenly day, so Susannah may scold till she's tired."

"Hold the reins for a moment, Miss Myra, if you please." Jim left the mare's head and walked down the quay, holding up his hand to delay the young sailor, who slewed his boat round, and brought her alongside again. The pair were whispering together. Myra heard a sharp exclamation, and in a moment Tom Trevarthen was sculling away for dear life. Jim ran back, jumped into the cart, and took the reins.

"But what is he shouting?" asked Myra, as the

mare's hoofs struck and slid on the cobbles and the cart seemed to spring forward beneath her. She clutched her brother as they swayed past mooring-posts, barrels, coils of rope, and with a wild lurch around the tollman's house at the quay-head, breasted the steep village street. "What's he shouting?" she demanded again.

Jim made no answer, but, letting the reins lie loose, flicked Actress smartly with the whip. Even a child could tell that no horse ought to be put at a hill in this fashion. Faces appeared at cottage doors—faces Myra had never seen in her life—gazing with a look she could not understand. All the faces, too, seemed to wear this look.

"What has happened?"

At the top of the hill, on a smoother road, the mare settled down to a steady gallop. Jim Tregay turned himself half-about in his seat.

"From battle and murder and from sudden death —good Lord, deliver us!"

"Oh, Jim, be kind and tell us!"

"Your grandfather, missy—the old maister! They found 'en in the counting-house this mornin' dead as a nail!"

Myra, with an arm about Clem and her disengaged hand gripping the light rail of the cart, strove to fix her mind, to bring her brain to work upon Jim's

words. But they seemed to spin past her with the hedgerows and the rushing wind in her ears. A terrible blow had fallen. Why could she not feel it? Why did she sit idly wondering, when even a dumb creature like Actress seemed to understand and put forth all her fleetness?

"Who sent you for us? Susannah?"

"Susannah's no better than a daft woman. Peter Benny sent me. He took down the news to Mrs. Purchase, and she told him where you was gone. He called out the horse-boat and packed me across the ferry instanter."

Myra gazed along the ridge of the mare's back to her heaving shoulders.

"Clem!" she whispered.

"Yes," said the boy slowly, "I am trying to understand. Why are we going so fast?"

So he too found it difficult. In truth their grandfather had stood outside their lives, a stern, towering shadow from the touch of which they crept away to nestle in each other's love. Because his presence brooded indoors they had never felt happy of the house. Because he seldom set foot in the garden they had made the garden their playground, their real nursery; the garden, and on wet days the barn, the hay-lofts, the apple-lofts, any Alsatia beyond the rules, where they could run free and lift their voices.

He had never been unkind, but merely neglectful, unsmiling, coldly deterrent, unapproachable. They knew, of course, that he was great, that grown men and women stood in awe of him.

When at length Jim Tregay reined up in the roadway above the ferry, they found a vehicle at a stand there, with a rough-coated grey horse in a lather of sweat; and peering over the wall from her perch in the spring-cart, Myra spied Mr. Benny on the slipway below, in converse with a tall, black-coated man who held by the hand a black-coated boy. As a child, she naturally let her gaze rest longer on the boy than on the man; but by and by, as she led Clem down the slipway, she found herself staring at the two with almost equal distaste.

Little Mr. Benny ran up the slipway to meet the children. His eyes were red, and it was with difficulty that he controlled his voice.

"My dears," he began, taking Myra by the hand and clasping it between his palms, "my poor dears, a blow indeed! a terrible blow! Your uncle—dear me, I believe you have never met! Let me present you to your uncle, Mr. Samuel, and your cousin, Master Calvin Rosewarne. These are the children, Mr. Samuel—Miss Myra and Master Clem—and, as I was saying, I sent a trap to fetch them home with all speed."

The man in black shook hands with the children gloomily. Myra noted that his whiskers were black and straggling, and that, though his upper lip was long, it did not hide his prominent yellow teeth. As for the boy, he shook hands as if under protest, and fell at once to staring hard at Clem. He had a pasty-white face, which looked the unhealthier for being surmounted by a natty velveteen cap with a patent-leather up-and-down peak, and he wore a black overcoat, like a minister's, knickerbockers, grey woollen stockings, and spring-side boots, the tags of which he had neglected to turn in.

"You sent for them?" asked Mr. Samuel sourly as he shook hands, turning a fishy eye upon Mr. Benny. "Why did you send for them?"

"Eh?" stammered Mr. Benny. "Their poor grandfather, Mr. Samuel! I could not have forgiven myself. It was, after telegraphing to you, my first thought."

"I can't see with what object you sent for them," persisted Mr. Samuel, and pulled at his ragged whiskers. "Were they—er—away on a visit? staying with friends? If so, I should have thought they were much better left till after the funeral."

He shifted his gaze from Mr. Benny and fixed it on Myra, who flushed hotly. What right had this Mr. Samuel to be interfering and taking charge?

"We were not staying with friends," she answered, "or paying any visit. Clem and I have never slept away from home in our lives. We have been across the bay with the rafts—that's all; and Aunt Hannah gave us leave."

He ignored her display of temper. "You've been let run wild, you two, I daresay," he replied, in a tone almost rallying. "I guess you have had matters pretty much your own way."

Poor Myra! This was the first whole holiday she and Clem had ever taken. But how could she tell him? She gulped down her tears—she was glad he had turned away without perceiving them—clutched Clem's hand in silence, and followed down to the boat, which Uncle Vro was bringing alongside.

As the party settled themselves in the sternsheets Master Calvin fixed his pale, gooseberry-coloured eyes on hers.

"You needn't show temper," he said slowly, with the air of a young ruminant animal.

"I'm not showing temper!" Myra retorted in a tone which certainly belied her.

"Yes, you are; and you've told a fib, which only makes things worse." He smiled complacently at having beaten her in argument, and Myra thought she had never met such an insufferable boy in her life.

He transferred his unblinking stare to Clem, and

for half a minute took stock of him silently. "Is he blind," he asked aloud, "or only pretending?"

Myra's face flamed now. A little more, and she had boxed his ears; but she checked herself and, caressing the back of Clem's hand, answered with grave irony, "He *was* blind, up to a minute ago; but now, since seeing you, he prefers to be pretending."

Master Calvin considered this for almost a minute. "That's rude," he announced at length decisively.

But meanwhile other passengers in the boat had found time to get themselves at loggerheads.

"Your servant, Master Samuel!" began old Nicky affably, as he fell to his oars. "I hope I see 'ee well, though 'tis a sad wind that blows 'ee here. Ay, there's a prophet gone this day from Israel!"

Mr. Samuel frowned. "Good-evening," he answered coldly, and added, with an effort to be polite, "I seem to know your face, too."

"He-he!" Uncle Nicky leaned on his oars with a senile chuckle. "Know my face, dost-a? Ought to, be sure, for I be the same Nicholas Vro that ferried 'ee back and forth in the old days, afore your father's stomach soured against 'ee. Dostn't-a mind that evening I put 'ee across with your trunks for the last time? 'Never take on, Master Sam,' said I—for all the parish knew and talked of your differences

—'give the old man time, and you'll be coming home for the Christmas holidays as welcome as flowers in May.' 'Not me,' says you; 'my father's is a house o' wrath, and there's no place for me.' A mort o' tide-water have runned up an' down since you spoke they words; but here be I, Nicholas Vro, takin' 'ee back home as I promised. Many times I've a-pictered 'ee, hearing you was grown prosperous and a married man and had took up with religion. I won't say that years have bettered your appearance; 'tisn't their way. But I'd ha' picked out your face in a crowd—or your cheeld's, for that matter. He features you wonderful."

"I remember you now," said Mr. Sam. "You haven't grown any less talkative in all these years." He turned to Mr. Benny. "Your telegram was sent off at nine-forty-five. Was that as early as possible?"

"I can say 'yes' to that, Mr. Samuel. Of course I had to begin by quieting the servants—they were scared out of their wits, and it took me some time to coax them out of their alarm. Then, taking boat, I rowed down to the post-office, stopping only at the barque yonder, to break the news to Mrs. Purchase. She put on her bonnet at once and was rowed ashore. 'Twas from her, too, I learned the whereabouts of Miss Myra and Master Clem; for up at the house they could not be found, and this had thrown Miss Su-

sannah into worse hysterics—she could only imagine some new disaster. At first I was minded to send a boat after them, but by this time the rafts were a good two miles beyond the harbour, and Mrs. Purchase said, 'No, they can do no good, poor dears; let them have their few hours' pleasure.' From the barque I pulled straight to the post-office, and sent off the telegram, and—dear me, yes—at the same time I posted a letter. I had found it, ready stamped, lying on the floor by my poor master's feet. It must have dropped from his hand; no doubt he had just finished writing it when the end came."

"But why such a hurry to post it?"

"It was marked 'Private and Immediate.'"

"For whom?"

Mr. Benny hesitated. "You will excuse me, Mr. Samuel"—

"Confidential?"

"As a matter of fact, sir, when Mr. Rosewarne marked his letters so I made it a rule never to read the address. But this one—coming upon it as I did—I couldn't help"—

"You prefer to keep the address to yourself?"

"With your leave, sir."

Mr. Samuel eyed him sharply. "Quite right!" he said curtly, with a glance at Uncle Vro; but the old man was not listening.

"Lord! and I mind his second marriage!" he muttered. "A proper lady she was, from up Tamar-way. He brought her home across water, and that's unlucky, they say; but he never minded luck. Firm as a nail he ever was, and put me in mind of the nail in Isaiah: 'As a nail in a sure place I will fasten him, and they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups even to all the vessels of flagons.' But the offspring and the issue, my dears," he went on, addressing Clem and Myra, "was but your poor mother. Well-a-well, weak or strong, we go in our time!"

As they landed and climbed the hill, Mr. Sam spoke with Peter Benny aside.

"They may ask about that letter at the inquest. You have thought of the inquest, of course?"

"If they do, I must answer them."

"So far as you know, there was nothing in it to cause strong emotion—nothing to account—?"

"Dear me, no," answered Mr. Benny, staring at him in mild astonishment; "so far as I know, nothing whatever."

After packing Susannah off to her room with a Bible and a smelling-bottle, Mrs. Purchase had set herself to reduce the household to order. "'Tisn't in

nature to think of death," confessed Martha the dairy-girl, "when you'm worrited from pillar to post by a woman in creaky boots."

Above and beside her creaky boots Aunt Hannah had a cheerful, incurable habit of slamming every door she passed through. It came, she would explain, of living on shipboard where cabin was divided from cabin either by a simple curtain or by sliding panels. Be this as it may, she kept the house of mourning re-echoing that day "like a labouring ship with a cargo of tinware," to quote Martha again, whose speech derived many forcible idioms from her father, the mate of a coaster.

Nevertheless—and although it appeared to induce a steady breeze through the house, rising to a moderate gale when meals were toward—Aunt Hannah's presence acted like a tonic on all. She presented to Mr. Sam a weather-ruddied cheek, receiving his kiss on what, in so round a face as hers, might pass for the point of the jaw. In saluting Master Calvin she had perforce to take the offensive, and did so with equal aplomb. After a rapid survey of some three seconds she picked off his velveteen cap and kissed him accurately in the centre of the forehead.

"I meant to do it on the top of his head," she informed Myra later, "but the ghastly child was smothered in bear's-grease. Lord knows that, as 'twas,

I very nearly slipped in my thumb and kissed *that*, as I've heard tell that folks do in the witness-box."

Myra did not understand the allusion; but from the first she divined that her aunt misliked Master Calvin and found that mislike consolatory.

"As for these two," the good lady announced, indicating brother and sister, "I allow to myself they'll be best out of the way till the funeral. I've been through the clothes-press, and put up their night-clothes and a few odd items in a hand-bag. 'Siah will be here at eight-thirty sharp, to take 'em aboard with him. For my part, I reckon to sleep here to-night and look after things till that fool Susannah comes to her senses. And as for you, Peter Benny, you'll stay supper, I hope, for there's supper ready and waiting to be dished—a roast leg of lamb, with green peas. It puts me in mind of Easter Day," she added inconsequently. "You may remember, Sam, that your poor father always stickled for a roast leg of lamb at Easter. He was a good Christian to that extent, I thank the Lord!"

"And I thank *you*, ma'am," protested Mr. Benny, "but I couldn't touch a morsel—indeed I couldn't, though you offer it so kindly."

"To my knowledge, you've not eaten enough to-day to keep a mouse alive. Well, if you won't, you won't; but I've been through the garden, and

there's a dish of strawberries to take home to your wife."

Mrs. Purchase could not know—good soul—that in removing the two children to shipboard, to spare them the ugly preparations for the funeral, she was connecting their grandfather's death in their minds for ever with the most delightful holiday in life. Yet so it was. Punctually at half-past eight Mr. Purchase appeared and escorted them on board the *Virtuous Lady;* and so, out-tired with their long day, drugged and drowsed by strong salt air and sunshine and the swift homeward drive, they came at nightfall, and as knights and princesses come in fairy tales, to the palace of enchantment. As they drew close, its walls towered up terribly and overhung them, lightless, forbidding; but far aloft the riding-lamp flamed like a star, and Myra clapped her hands as she reached the deck and peered down into a marvellous doll's-house fitted with couches, muslin blinds, and brass-locked cupboards that twinkled in the lamplight. There was a stateroom, too, with a half-drawn red curtain in place of a door, and beyond the curtain a glimpse of two beds, one above the other, with white sheets turned back and ready for the sleepers—at once like and deliciously unlike the beds at home. The children, having unpacked their bag and undressed,

knelt down side by side as usual in their white night-rails. But Myra could not pray, although she repeated the words with Clem. Her eyes wandered among marvels. The lower bed (assigned to Clem by reason of his blindness) was not only a bed but a chest of drawers.

> "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
> Look upon a little child ;
> Pity my simplicity"—

Her fingers felt and tried the brass handles. Yes, a real chest of drawers! And the washstand folded up in a box, and in place of a chair was a rack with netting in which to lay their garments for the night! "God bless dear Clem, and grandfather"— What was she saying? Their grandfather was dead, and praying for dead people was wicked. Susannah had once caught her praying for her mother, and had told her that it was wicked, with a decisiveness that closed all argument. None the less she had prayed for her mother since then—once or twice, perhaps half a dozen times—though slily and in a terror of being punished for it and sent to hell. "And Susannah, and Martha, and Elizabeth Jane"—this was the housemaid—"and Peter Benny, and Jim Tregay, and all kind friends and relations"—including Uncle Sam and that odious boy of his? Well, they might go down in the list; but she wouldn't pretend to like them.

"Ready, my dears?" asked Uncle Purchase from outside. "Sing out when you're in bed, and I'll come and dowse the lights."

He did so, and stood for a moment hesitating, scarcely visible in the faint radiance cast through the doorway by the lamp in his own cabin. Maybe the proper thing would be to give them a kiss apiece? He could not be sure, being a childless man. He ended by saying good-night so gruffly that Myra fancied he must be in a bad temper.

"Clem!" she whispered, after lying still for a while, staring into darkness. "Clem!"

But Clem was already sound asleep.

She sighed and turned on her pillow. She had wanted to discuss with him a thought that vexed her. Did folks love one another when they grew up? And, if so, how did they manage it, seeing that so few grown-ups had anything lovable about them? Clem and she, of course, would go on loving each other always; but that was different. When one grown-up person died, were the others really sorry? No one seemed sorry for her grandfather—no one—except, perhaps, Peter Benny. . . .

For two days the children lived an enchanted life, interrupted only by a visit to Miss de Gruchy, the dressmaker across the water, and by a miserable two

hours in which they were supposed to entertain their Cousin Calvin, who had been sent to play with them. The boy—he was about a year older than Myra—greeted them with an air of high importance.

"I've seen the corp!" he announced in an ogreish whisper.

Myra had the sense to guess that if she gave any sign of horror he would only show off the more and tease her. She met him, therefore, on his own ground.

"Well, you needn't think *we* want to, because we don't!"

"Oh, they'll show it to you before they screw it down. But I saw it first!"

For the next forty-eight hours this awful possibility darkened her delight. For it *was* a possibility. Grown people did such monstrous unaccountable things, there was no saying what they might not be up to next. And here, for once, was an ordeal Clem could not share with her. He was blind. Alone, if it must be, she must endure it.

She did not feel safe until the coffin had been actually packed in the hearse and the long procession started. To her dismay, they had parted her from Clem. He rode in the first coach beside Aunt Hannah and *vis-à-vis* with her Uncle Samuel and

Cousin Calvin; she in the second with Mr. Purchase, Peter Benny, and Mr. Tulse the lawyer, a large-headed, pallid man with a strong, clean-shaven face and an air of having attended so many funerals that he paid this one no particular attention. His careless gentility obviously impressed Mr. Purchase, who mopped his forehead at half-minute intervals and as frequently remarked that the day was hot even for the time of year. Mr. Benny was solicitous to know if Mr. Tulse preferred the window up or down. Mr. Tulse preferred it down, and took snuff in such profusion that by and by Myra could not distinguish the floating particles from the dust which entered from the roadway, stirred up by the feet of the crowd backing to let the carriages pass. Myra had never seen, never dreamed of, such a crowd. It lined both sides of the road almost to the church gate—and from Hall to the church was a good mile and a half; lines of freemasons with their aprons, lines of foresters in green sashes, lines of coast-guards, of fishermen in blue jerseys crossed with the black and white mourning ribbons of the local Benevolent Club; here and there groups of staring children, some holding tightly by their mothers' hands; here and there a belated gig, quartering to give way or falling back to take up its place in the rear of the line. The sun beat down on the roof of the coach,

drawing a powerful odour of camphor from its cushions. For years after the scent of camphor recalled all the moving pageant and the figure of Mr. Tulse seated in face of her and abstractedly taking snuff. But at the time, and until they drew up at the churchyard gate, she was wondering why the ships in the harbour had dressed themselves in gay bunting. The flags were all half-masted, of course; but she had not observed this, nor, if she had, would she have known the meaning of it.

In the great family pew she found herself by Clem's side, listening to the lesson, of which a few words and sentences somehow remained in her memory; and again, as they trooped out, Clem's hand was in hers. But to the ceremony she paid little attention. The grave had been dug hard by the south-east corner of the churchyard, close by a hedge of thorn, on the farther side of which the ground fell steeply to a narrow coombe. The bright sun, sinking behind the battlements of the church tower, flung their shadow so that a part cut across the parson's dazzling surplice, while a part fell and continued the pattern on the hillside across the valley. And while the parson recited, high over the tower a lark sang.

Someone asked her if she wished to look down on the coffin in its bed. She shrank away, fearing for the moment that the trick of which she had stood in

dread for two days was to be played on her now at the last.

But the mysterious doings of her elders were not yet at an end, for no sooner had they reached home again than she and Clem were hustled into the parlour, to find Mr. Tulse seated at the head of the long table with a paper in his hand, and Mr. Samuel in a chair by the empty fireplace with Cousin Calvin beside him. Aunt Hannah disposed herself between the two children with her back to a window, and Uncle Purchase, having closed the door with extraordinary caution, dropped upon the edge of a chair and sat as if ready to jump up at call and expel any intruder.

Mr. Tulse glanced around with that quiet, well-bred air of his which seemed to take everything for granted. Having satisfied himself that all were assembled, he cleared his throat and began to read. His manner and intonation suggested family prayers; and Myra, not doubting that this must be some kind of postscript to the burial service for the private consolation of the family, let her mind wander. The word "testament" in the first sentence seemed to make this certain, and the sentence or two that followed had a polysyllabic vagueness which by habit she connected with the offices of religion. The strained look on Aunt Hannah's face drew her at-

tention away from Mr. Tulse and his recital. Her ear had been caught, too, by a low whining sound in the next room. By and by she heard him speak her own name—her's and Clem's together—and glanced around nervously. She had a particular dislike of being prayed for by name. It made her blush and gave her a curious sinking sensation in the pit of the stomach. Her eyes, as it happened, came to rest on her Uncle Samuel's, who withdrew his gaze at once and stared into the fireplace.

A moment later Mr. Tulse brought his reading to an end. There was a pause, broken by someone's pushing back a chair. She gazed around inquiringly, thinking that this perhaps might be a signal for all to kneel.

Her aunt had risen, and stood for a moment with twitching face, challenging a look from Mr. Samuel, who continued to stare at the shavings in the fireplace.

Whatever Mrs. Purchase had on her lips to say to him, she controlled herself. But she turned upon Myra and Clem, and her eyes filled.

"My poor dears!" she said, stretching out both hands. "My poor, poor dears!"

Myra thought it passing strange that, if she and Clem were to be pitied for losing their grandfather, Aunt Hannah should have waited till now. She

BOOK II

CHAPTER VIII

HESTER ARRIVES

Hester Marvin stood on the windy platform gazing after the train. Her limbs were cramped and stiff after the long night journey; the grey morning hour discouraged her; and the landscape—a stretch of grey-green marsh with a horizon-line of slate-roofed cottages terminated by a single factory chimney—was not one to raise the spirits. Even the breeze blowing across the marsh had an unfamiliar edge. She felt it, and shivered.

She had been the only passenger to alight here from the train, which had brought her almost all the way from the Midlands; and as it steamed off, its smoke blown level along the carriage roofs, her gaze followed it wistfully, almost forlornly, with a sense of lost companionship. She knew this to be absurd, and yet she felt it.

Between the chimney and this ridge the train passed out of sight; but still her gaze followed the long curve of the metals across the marsh. They stretched away, and with them the country seemed

to expand and flatten itself, yielding to the sky an altogether disproportionate share of the prospect—at any rate in eyes accustomed to the close elms and crooked hedgerows of Warwickshire.

She withdrew her gaze at last, and glancing up the long platform spied her solitary trunk, as absurdly forlorn as herself. A tall man—the stationmaster—bent over it, examining the label, and she walked towards him, glancing up as she passed the station clock.

"No use your looking at *him*," said the stationmaster, straightening himself up in time to observe the glance. "He never kept time yet, and don't mean to begin. Breaks my heart, he do."

"How far is it from here to Troy?"

"Three miles and a half, we reckon it; but you may call it four, counting the hills."

"Oh, there are hills, are there?" said Hester, and looking around she blushed; for indeed the country was hilly on three sides of her and flat only in the direction whither she had been staring after the train.

The stationmaster did not observe her confusion. "Were you expecting anyone to meet you, miss?" he asked.

"Yes, from Troy. A Mr. Benny—Mr. Peter Benny." She felt for the letter in her pocket.

The stationmaster's smile broadened. "Peter Benny? To be sure—a punctual man, too, but with a terrible long family. And when a man has a long family, and leaves these little things to 'em—But someone will be here, miss, sooner or later. And this will be your luggage?"

"Three miles and a half, you say?—or four at the most?" Hester stood considering, while her eyes wandered across to a siding beyond the up-platform, where three men stood in talk before a goods van. Two of them were porters; the third—a young fellow in blue jersey, blue cloth trousers, and a peaked cap—was apparently persuading them to open the van, which they no sooner did than he leapt inside. Hester heard him calling from within the van and the two porters laughing. "Four miles?" She turned to the stationmaster again. "I can walk that easily. You have a cloak-room, I suppose, where I can leave my trunk?"

"I'll take it home with me, miss, for safety: that is, if you're really bent on walking." He jerked his thumb towards a cottage on the slope behind. "No favour at all. I'm just going back to breakfast, and it won't take me a minute to fetch out a barrow and run it home. Whoever comes for your luggage will know where to call. You'd best give me your hand-bag too."

"Thank you, but I can carry that easily."

"The Bennys always turn up sooner or later," he went on musingly. "If they miss one train, they catch the next. Really, miss, there's no occasion to walk. But if you must, and I may make so bold, why not step over to my house and have a cup of tea before starting? The kettle's on the boil, and my wife would make you welcome. We've a refreshment-room here in the station," he added apologetically, "but it don't open till the nine-twenty-seven."

Hester thanked him again, but would not accept the invitation. He fetched the barrow for her trunk, and walked some little distance with her, wheeling it. Where their ways parted he gave her the minutest directions, and stood in the middle of the roadway to watch her safely past her first turning.

The aspect of the land was strange to her, but the stationmaster's kindness had made it less unhomely. The road ran under the base of a hill to her left, between it and the marsh. It rose a little before reaching the line of slate-roofed cottages; and as she mounted this rise the wind met her more strongly, and with more of that tonic sharpness she had shrunk from a while ago. It was shrewd, yet she felt that it was also wholesome. Above the cottage roofs she now perceived many masts of vessels clustered near the base of the tall chimney. She bent her head against

the breeze. When she raised it again after a short stiff climb, she looked—and for the first time in her life—upon the open sea.

It stretched—another straight line—beyond the cottage roofs, in colour a pale, unvaried grey-blue, and her first sensation was wonder at its bare simplicity. She rested her bag upon the low hedge, and stood beside it at gaze, her body bent forward to meet the wind.

For five minutes and more she stood there, so completely absorbed that the sound of footsteps on the road drew near and passed her unheard. A few paces beyond they came to a halt.

"Begging your pardon, miss, but that bag is heavy for you," said a voice.

She turned with a start, and, as she did so, was aware of a scent about her, not strong, but deliciously clean and fragrant. It came from a tuft of wild thyme on which her palm had been pressing while she leaned.

"Thank you, it is not heavy," she answered, in some confusion. "I—I just rested it here while I looked out to sea."

She knew him at once for the blue-jerseyed young man she had seen in talk with the porters; and apparently he had prevailed, for he stooped under the weight of a great burden, in which Hester recognised

a blackboard, an easel, a coloured globe, and sundry articles of school furniture very cleverly lashed together and slung across his shoulder by a stout cord. He was smiling, and she smiled too, moved perhaps by the sight of these familiar objects in a strange land.

"If you'm bound for Troy, you may so well let me carry it, miss. There's a terrible steep hill to go up, and a pound or two's weight won't make no difference to what I got here."

She had taken up her bag resolutely and was moving on. The young man—it was most awkward—also moved on, and in step with her. She compressed her lip, wondering how to hint that she did not desire his company. A glance told her that he was entirely without guile, that he had made his offer in mere good-nature. How might she dismiss him and yet avoid hurting his feelings?

"They argued me down at the station," he went on. "Would have it the traps couldn' possibly be in the van. But I wasn't going to have my walk for nothing if I could help it. 'Give me leave to look,' said I; and I was right, you see!"

He nodded his head as triumphantly as his burden allowed. It weighed him down, and the stoop gave his eyes, when he smiled, an innocent roguish slant. Hester noted that he wore rings in his brown

ears, and somehow these ornaments made him appear the more boyish.

"But what are you doing with a blackboard and easel?" she asked.

"They're for old Mother Butson. She lives with my mother and keeps school. Tidy little outlay for her, all this parcel! but she must move with the times, poor soul."

"Then hers is not a Board School?—since she is buying these things for herself."

"Board School? Not a bit of it. You're right there, miss: we're the Opposition." He laughed, showing two rows of white regular teeth.

"Are you a teacher too?"

She had no sooner asked the question than she knew it to be ridiculous. A teacher, in blue jersey and earrings! He laughed, more merrily than ever.

"Me, miss? My name's Trevarthen—Tom Trevarthen: and I'm a seaman; ordinary till last voyage, but now A.B." He said this with pride: of what it meant she had not the ghost of a notion. "A man don't need scholarship in my way o' life; but, being on shore for a spell, you see, miss, I'm helping the old gal to fight the School Board. 'Tis hard on her, too."

"What is hard?" Hester asked, her professional interest aroused.

"Why, to have the bread taken out of her mouth at her time of life. She sent in an application, but the Board wouldn't look at it. Old Rosewarne, they say, had another teacher in his eye, and got her appointed—some up-country body. Ne'er a man on the Board had the pluck to say 'Bo' when *he* opened his mouth."

"Rosewarne?" Hester came to a halt.

"That bag is too heavy for you, miss. Hand it over—do'ee, now!"

"Are you talking of Mr. John Rosewarne?"

"Ay, Rosewarne of Hall—he did it. If you was a friend of his, miss, I beg your pardon; but a raspin' old tyrant he was. Sing small, you might be let off and call yourself lucky; stand up to 'en, and he'd have you down and your face in the dust if it cost a fortune."

"Wait a moment, please!" Hester commanded, halting for breath. They had reached a steep hill, and the tall hedgerows shut out the sea; but its far roar sounded in her ears. She nodded towards the bundle on his shoulders. "Are those things meant to fight the new schoolmistress?"

"That's of it. The old woman has pluck enough for a hundred. But, as I tell her, she may get the billet now, after all, since the old fellow's gone, and Mr. Sam—they do say—favours the Dissenters."

"I don't understand. 'Gone'? Who is gone?"

"Why, old Rosewarne. Who else?"

"You are not telling me that Mr. Rosewarne is dead?"

"Beggin' your pardon, miss—but he's dead, and buried last Saturday. There! I han't upset you, have I? I took it for certain that everyone knew. And you seeming an acquaintance of his, and being, so to speak, in black"—

"But I heard from him only last Thursday—less than a week ago!" Hester's hand went to her pocket. To be sure she possessed, with Rosewarne's letter, a second from a Mr. Peter Benny, acknowledging her acceptance of the post, and promising that she should be met on her arrival, on the day and hour suggested by her. But Mr. Benny's letter had been cautiously worded, and said nothing of his master's death.

The young sailor had come to a halt with her, evidently puzzled, and for the fourth time at least was holding out a hand to relieve her of her bag.

"No!" she said. "You must walk on, please; I am the new schoolmistress."

It took him aback, but not in the way she had expected. His face became grave at once, but still wore its puzzled look, into which by degrees there crept another look of pity.

"You can't know what you'm doing then, miss; I'm sure of that. They haven't told you. She's a very old woman, and 'tis all the bread she has."

He stared at her, seeking reassurance.

"You are certainly right, so far: I have tumbled, it seems, into mysteries. But for aught I know, I *am* the new schoolmistress, and we are enemies, it seems. Now will you walk ahead, or shall I?"

Still he paused, considering her face.

"But if you knew what a shame it is!" he stammered. "And you look good, too!"

With a movement of the hand she begged him to leave her and walk ahead. But as she did so she caught sound of hoofs and wheels on the road above. They drew apart to let the vehicle pass, she to one side of the road, the young sailor to the other. A light spring-cart came lurching round the corner; and its driver, glancing from one to the other, drew rein sharply, dragging the rough-coated cob back with a slither on the splash-board, and bringing him to a stand between them.

CHAPTER IX

MR. SAMUEL'S POLICY

HESTER'S letter accepting the teachership had put Mr. Sam in something of a quandary. It came addressed, of course, to his father, and as his father's heir and executor he had opened it.

"'Hester Marvin'?" He read the signature and pondered, pulling his ragged whisker. "So that was the name on the letter you posted?" (No question had been asked about it at the inquest.)

"That was the name, sir," said Mr. Benny.

"Who is she? How did my father come to select her?"

Mr. Benny had not a notion.

"By her tone, they must have been pretty well acquainted," continued Mr. Sam, still pondering. "She signs herself 'Yours very truly,' and hopes he has been feeling better since his return. You know absolutely nothing about her?"

"Absolutely nothing, sir."

"I wish"—Mr. Sam began, but checked himself. What he really wished was that Mr. Benny had used less haste in posting the letter—had inter-

cepted it, in short. But he did not like to say this aloud. "I wish," he went on, "I knew exactly what the old man wrote; how far it committed us, I mean." And by "us" again, he meant the Board of Managers, upon which he had no doubt of being elected to replace his father.

"You may be sure, sir," answered Mr. Benny, "that he made her a definite offer. My dear master was never one to make two bites of a cherry."

"Well, we must let her come, and find out, if we can, how far we're committed. Better write at once and fix a date—say next Thursday. You needn't say anything about my father's death. Just make it a formal letter, and sign your own name; you may add 'Clerk of the School Board.'"

"Can I rightly do that, sir?" Mr. Benny hesitated.

"Why not? You *are* the clerk, aren't you? As clerk, you answer her simply in the way of business. There's no need to call a meeting of the Board over such a trifle; though, if you wish, I'll explain it personally to the Managers. We may have a dozen cases like this before we get into working order—small odds and ends which require, nevertheless, to be dealt with promptly. We must do what's best, and risk small irregularities."

Mr. Benny, not quite convinced, fell to compos-

ing his letter. Mr. Sam leaned back in his chair and mused, tapping his long teeth with a paper-knife. He wondered what kind of a woman this Hester Marvin might be, and of what religious "persuasion." In a week or two he would succeed to his father's place on the Board. There would be no opposition, and it seemed to him natural and right that there should be none. Was he not by far the richest man in the parish? Samuel Rosewarne studied his Bible devoutly; but he did not seek it for anything which might stand in the way of his own will or his private advantage. When he came upon a text condemning riches, for instance, or definitely bidding him to forgive a debtor, he told himself that Christ was speaking figuratively, or was, at any rate, not to be taken literally, and with that he passed on to something more comfortable. He did not, of course, really believe this, but he had to tell himself so; for otherwise he would have to alter his whole way of life, or confess himself an irreligious man. But he was, on the contrary, a highly religious man, and he had no disposition to alter his life.

He hated the Church of England, too, because he perceived it to be full of abuses; and he supposed that the best way to counteract these abuses was to put a spoke in the Church's wheel wherever and whenever he could. In this he but copied the adversary—Par-

son Endicott, for example—who hated Dissent, perceiving that it rested on self-assertiveness, encouraging unlearned men to be opinionative in error. Perceiving this, Parson Endicott supposed himself to be combating error by snatching at every advantage, great or small, which exalted the supremacy of his Church and left Dissent the worse in any bargain. To neither of these men, both confident in their "cause," did it occur for a moment to leave that cause to the energy of its own truth.

The parson, however, was not likely to bring forward an opposition candidate; for that would conflict with a second principle of conduct, the principle of siding with the rich on all possible occasions. By doing this in his small way he furthered at once the cause of stable government—that is to say, the rule of the poor by the wealthy—and the cause of his own Church, which (he fully believed) in these times depends for existence upon mendicancy. Therefore Mr. Samuel would certainly be elected; and counting on this, he felt sorry to have missed the chance of giving the teachership, by his casting vote, to one of his own sect—some broad-minded, undenominational person who would teach the little ones to abhor all that savoured of popery. To be sure, this Hester Marvin might be such a person. On the other hand, his father had been capable of choosing some Jew, Turk, infidel,

or heretic, or even papist. It remained to discover, first, what kind of woman this Hester Marvin might be; and next, whether or not the terms of her engagement amounted to a contract.

"By the way," said Mr. Sam, as Mr. Benny sat pursing his lips over the letter, "you take in a lodger now and then, I believe?"

"Now and then," Mr. Benny assented, looking up and biting the end of his quill. He did not understand the drift of the question. "Now and then, sir," he repeated; "when my wife's health allows."

"Then add a line, telling her she shall be met at the station, and that you will put her up."

"But, Mr. Samuel, I could scarcely bring myself to offer"—

"Tut, man; you don't ask her to pay. I'll see to that. Merely say that you hope she will be your guest until she finds suitable lodgings."

"That is very kind of you, sir."

"Not at all." He reached out a hand for Mr. Benny's letter, read it through, and nodded. "Yes, that will do; seal it up and let it go by next post. My father had great confidence in you, Benny."

"He ever did me that great honour, sir."

"I hope we shall get on together equally well. I daresay we shall."

"It comforts me to hear you say so, sir. When

a man gets up in years—with a long family depending on him"—

"Of course, if this Miss Marvin should happen to give you further particulars of my father's offer, so much the better," said Mr. Sam negligently.

As the little man went down the hill towards the ferry he was pounced upon by Mother Butson, who regularly now watched for him and waylaid him on his way home.

"Hold hard, Peter Benny—it's no use your trying to slip by now!"

"I wasn't, Mrs. Butson; indeed, now, I wasn't!" he protested; though indeed this waylaying had become a torment to him.

"Well, and what have they decided?" The poor old soul asked it fiercely, yet trembled while waiting for his answer, almost hoping that he would have none.

Mr. Benny longed to say that nothing was decided; but the letter in his pocket seemed to be burning against his ribs. He was a truthful man.

"It don't lie with me, Mrs. Butson; I'm only the clerk, and take my orders. But I must warn you not to be too hopeful. The person that Mr. Rosewarne selected will come down and be interviewed. That's only right and proper."

All the village knew by this time what had happened at the last Board meeting.

"Coming, is she? Then 'tis true what I've heard, that the old varmint went straight from the meetin' and wrote off to the woman, and that the hand of God struck 'en dead in his chair. Say what you will"—the cracked voice shrilled up triumphantly—"'tis a judgment! What's the woman's name?"

"That I'm not allowed to tell you. And look here, Mrs. Butson—you mustn't use such talk of my poor dead master; indeed you mustn't." He looked past her appealingly and at Mrs. Trevarthen, who had come to her doorway to listen.

"I said what I chose to 'en while he was alive, and I'll say what I choose now. You was always a poor span'el, Peter Benny; but John Rosewarne never fo'ced *me* to lick his boots. 'Poor dead master!'" she mimicked. "Iss fay!—dead enough now, and poor, he that ground the poor!" At once she began to fawn. "But Mr. Sam 'll see justice done. You'll speak a word for me to Mr. Sam? He's a professin' Christian, and like as not when this woman shows herself she'll turn out to be some red-hot atheist or Jesuit. To bring the like o' they here was just the dirty trick that old heathen of yours would enjoy. Some blasphemy it must ha' been, or the hand o' God'd never have struck 'en as it did."

"Folks are saying," put in Mrs. Trevarthen from the doorway, "that Sall here ill-wished 'en. But she didn't. 'Twas his own sins compassed his end. Look to your ways, Peter Benny! Your master was an unbeliever and an oppressor, and now he's in hell-fire."

Mr. Benny put his hands to his ears and ran from these terrible women. For the moment they had both believed what they said, and yet old Rosewarne's belief or unbelief had nothing to do with their hatred. They gloated because he had been removed in the act of doing that which would certainly impoverish them. They, neither less nor more than Mr. Sam and Parson Endicott, made identical the will of God with their own wants.

Peter Benny as he crossed the ferry would have been uneasier and unhappier had he understood Mr. Sam's parting words. He had not understood them because he had never laid a scheme against man, woman, or child in his life. Still he was uneasy and unhappy enough: first, because it hurt him that anyone should speak as these old women had spoken of his dead master; next, because he really felt sorry for them, and was carrying a letter to their hurt; again because, in spite of Mr. Sam's reassuring words, he could not shake off a sense of having exceeded his duties by signing that letter without consulting the Board; and lastly, because in his confusion he had

forgotten his wife's state of health, and must break to the poor woman, just arisen from bed and nursing a three-weeks'-old baby, that he had invited a lodger. Now that he came to think of it, there was not a spare bedroom in the house!

CHAPTER X

NUNCEY

THE driver of the spring-cart was a brown-skinned, bright-eyed, and exceedingly pretty damsel of eighteen or twenty, in a pink print frock with a large crimson rose pinned in its bodice, and a pink sun-bonnet, under the pent of which her dark hair curtained her temples in two ample rippling bands.

"Why, hullo!" She reined up. Hester and the young sailor had fallen apart to let her pass, and from her perch she stared down from one side of the road to the other with a puzzled, jolly smile. "Mornin', Tom!"

"Mornin', Nuncey!"

"Sakes alive! What be carryin' there 'pon your back?"

"School furnitcher."

The girl's eyes wandered from the bundle to Hester, and grew wide with surmise.

"You don't mean to tell me you're the new schoolmistress!"

"Yes, I'm Hester Marvin."

"And I pictered 'ee a frump! But, my dear soul," she asked with sudden solemnity, "what makes 'ee do it?"

"Do what?"

"Why, teach school? I al'ays reckoned that a trade for old persons—toteling poor bodies, 'most past any use except to worrit the children."

"And so 'tis," put in the young sailor angrily.

"Han't been crossed in love, have 'ee? But there! what be I clackin' about, when better fit I was askin' your pardon for bein' so late? I'm sent to fetch you over to Troy. Ought to have been here more'n a half-hour ago; but when you've five children to wash an' dress an' get breakfast for an' see their boots is shined, and after that to catch the hoss and put 'n to cart—well, you'll have to forgive it. That's your luggage Tom's carryin', I s'pose?—and a funny passel of traps school teachers travel with, I will say. You must be clever, though; else you couldn't have coaxed Tom Trevarthen to shoulder such a load. He wouldn't lift his little finger for *me*." She shot this unrighteous shaft with a mischievous side-glance, and laughed. She had beautiful teeth, and laughing became her mightily.

"But that is not my luggage."

"Not your luggage! Then where— Hullo!

have you two been quarrellin'? Well, I never! You can't have lost much time about it."

"I left my trunk at the station," Hester went on, flushing yet redder with annoyance.

"And this here belongs to Mother Butson," declared Tom Trevarthen, red also. "I'm fetchin' it home for her."

"Then take and pitch it into the tail of the trap; and you, my dear, hand up your bag and climb up alongside o' me. We'll drive back to station, fetch your trunk, and be back in time to overtake Tom at the top o' the hill and give him a lift home. There's plenty room for three on the seat—that is, by squeezin' a bit."

"You're very kind, Nuncey," said Tom Trevarthen sullenly. "But I'll not take a lift alongside o' *she;* and I'll not trouble you with my load, neither."

"Please yourself, you foolish mortal, you. But —I declare! You *must* have had a tiff!"

"No tiff at all," corrected Tom, sturdily wrathful. "It's despise her I do—comin' here and drivin' an old 'ooman to the workhouse!"

He turned on his heel and trudged away stubbornly up the hill.

Nuncey gazed back at him for a moment over her shoulder.

"Never saw Tom in such a tear in all my life,"

she commented cheerfully. "Take 'en all the week round, you couldn't find a better-natered boy. Well, jump up, my dear, and we'll fit and get your trunk. He may be cured of his sulks by time we overtake 'en."

Undoubtedly Hester had excuses enough for feeling hurt and annoyed; yet what mainly hurt and annoyed her (though she would not confess it) was that this sailor and this girl had each taken her as one on equal terms with themselves. She was a sensible girl, by far too sensible to nurse on second thoughts a conceit that she was their superior simply because she spoke better English. Yet habit had taught her to expect some degree of deference from those who spoke incorrectly; and we are all touchier upon our vaguely reasoned claims than upon those of which we have perfect assurance.

"J'p, Pleasant!" Nuncey called to the grey horse, flicking him lightly with the whip. The ill-balanced trap seesawed down the slope, and soon was spinning along the cliff-road, across which the wind blew with such force that Hester caught at her hat.

"Never mind a bit of breeze, my dear. And as for the touch of damp, 'tis nobbut the pride o' the mornin'. All for heat and pilchar's, as the saying is: we shall have it broiling hot afore noon. Now I come to think of it, 'tis high time we made our in-

troductions. I'm Nuncey Benny—that's short for Annunciation. This here hoss and trap belongs to my mother. She's a regrater when in health; but there's a baby come. That makes eleven of us. You'll find us a houseful."

"Your father was kind enough to offer me"—began Hester.

"Iss," broke in Nuncey; "father's kind, whatever else he may be. As for considerin' where to stow you, that never crossed his head. You mustn't think, my dear, that you bain't welcome. Only—well, I may so well get it over soon as late—you'll have to put up with a bed in the room with me. Shall you mind?"

"Of course I shall not mind," said Hester, conquered at once.

"Well, that's uncommon nice of you; and I don't mind tellin' 'ee 'tis the second load you've a-lifted off my mind. For, to start with, I made sure you was goin' to be a frump."

"But why?"

Nuncey had no time to explain, for they were now arrived at the stationmaster's cottage. The stationmaster himself welcomed them at the door, wiping his mouth.

"You'll step in and have a dish of tea, the both of you. It'll take off the edge of the mornin'."

Nuncey declined, after a glance at Hester, and at once fell to discussing the weather with the stationmaster while he hoisted in the trunk. Two of Hester's earliest discoveries in this strange land were that everyone talked about the weather, and everyone addressed everyone else as "My dear."

"Well, so long!" said the stationmaster. "Wind's going round wi' the sun, I see, same as yesterday. We're in for a hot spell, you mark my words."

"So long!" Nuncey shook the reins, and they started again. "Is that how sleeves are wearin', up the country?" she asked, after two or three glances at Hester's jacket.

"They are worn fuller than this, mostly," Hester answered gravely. "But you mustn't take me for an authority."

"I can see so far into a brick wall as most. Don't tell me! You're one to think twice about your clothes, for all you look so modest. Boots like yours cost more than I can spend on mine in a month o' Sundays; iss, and a trifle o' vanity thrown in. You've a very pretty foot—an' I like your face—an' your way o' dressin', if you weren't so sad-coloured. What's that for, makin' so bold?"

"It's for my father."

"There now, I'm sorry!—Always was a clumsy

fool, and always will be. I thought it might be for old Rosewarne, you bein' hand-in-glove with him."

"But I scarcely knew him. It was only just now I heard the news"— Hester broke off, colouring again with annoyance. What did these people mean, that they persisted in taking for granted her complicity in some mysterious plot?

By and by, at the top of the hill, they overtook the young sailor.

"Got over your sulks, Tom?" inquired Nuncey cheerfully. "If so, climb up and be sociable—there's plenty room."

But Tom shook his head without answering, though he drew close to the hedge to let the trap pass. It is difficult to look dignified with a blackboard, an easel, and a coloured globe on one's back. The globe absurdly reminded Hester of a picture of Atlas in one of her schoolbooks, and she could not help a smile. A moment later she would have given all her pocket-money to recall that smile, for he had glanced up, glowering, and observed it.

Nuncey laughed outright.

"But all the same," she remarked meditatively as they drove on, "I like the lad for 't. 'Tisn' everyone would do so much for the sake of an old 'ooman that never has a good word to fling at nobody, and maybe

spanked 'en blue when he was a tacker and went to school wi' her. He's terrible simple; and decent, too, for a sailor. I reckon there's a many think Mother Butson hardly used that wouldn't crack their backs for her as he's a-doing."

"He spoke to me," said Hester, "quite as if I were doing a wickedness in coming—as if, at least, I was selfish and unjust. And I never heard of this Mother Butson till half an hour ago! Do *you* think I'm unjust?"

"Well," Nuncey answered judiciously, "if any person had asked me that an hour ago, I'd have agreed with Tom. But 'tis different now I've seen your face."

Nuncey and the stationmaster were wise weather prophets. Here on the uplands the grey veil of morning fell apart, and dissolved so suddenly that before Hester had time to wonder the miracle was accomplished. A flood of sunshine broke over the ripening cornfields to right and left; the song of larks rang forth almost with a shout; beyond the golden ridges of the wheat the grey vapour faded as breath off a mirror, and lo! a clear line divided the turquoise sky from a sea of intensest iris-blue. As she watched the transformation her heart gave a lift, and the past few hours fell from her like an

evil dream. The stuffy compartment, the blear-eyed lamp, the train's roar and rattle, the forlorn arrival on the windy platform—all slipped away into a remote past. She had passed the gates of fear and entered an enchanted land.

As she looked abroad upon it she marvelled at a hundred differences between it and her native Midlands. It was wilder—infinitely wilder—than Warwickshire, and at the same time less unkempt; far more savage in outline, yet in detail sober almost to tidiness. It seemed to acknowledge the hand of some great unknown gardener; and this gardener was, of course, the sea-breeze now filling her lungs and bracing her strength. The shaven, landward-bending thorns and hollies, the close-trimmed hedgerow, the clean-swept highroad, alike proclaimed its tireless attentions. It favoured its own plants, too—the tamarisk on the hedge, the fuchsia and myrtle in the cottage garden. As the spring-cart nid-nodded down the hill towards Troy, the grey roofs of the town broke upon Hester's sight beyond a cloud of fuchsia blossoms in a garden at the angle of the road.

So steep was the hill, and so closely these roofs and chimneys huddled against it, that Hester leaned back with a catch of the breath that set Nuncey laughing. For the moment she verily supposed herself on the edge of a precipice. She caught one

glimpse of a blue water and the masts of shipping, and clutched at the cart-rail as the old grey began to slither at a business-like jog-trot down a street so narrow that, to make way for them, passers-by on foot ran hastily to the nearest doorways, whence one and all nodded good-naturedly at Nuncey. Of some houses the doors were reached by steep flights of steps tunnelled through the solid rock; of others by wooden stairways leading to balconies painted blue or green and adorned with pot-plants—geraniums, fuchsias, lemon-verbenas—on ledges imminent over Hester's head. The most of the passers-by were women carrying pails of water, or country folks with baskets of market stuff. The whole street seemed to be cleaning up and taking in provisions for the day, and all amid a buzz of public gossip, one housewife pausing on her balcony as she shook a duster, and leaning over to discuss market prices with her neighbour chaffering below. The cross-fire of talk died down as the dealers dispersed, snatching up their wares from under the wheels of the spring-cart, while the women took long, silent stock of Hester's appearance and dress. Behind her it broke forth again, louder than ever.

At the foot of the hill they swung round a corner, and passing a public-house and the rails of the parish church, threaded their way round two more

corners, and entered a street scarcely less narrow than the other, but level. Here Nuncey drew up before an ope through which Hester caught another glimpse of blue-green water. They had arrived.

A grinning lad lifted out Hester's trunk and bore it down the ope to a green-painted doorway, where a rosy-faced, extremely solemn child stared out on the world over a green-painted board, fixed across with the evident purpose of confining him to the house. Having despatched this urchin to warn his mother that "the furriner was come," the lad heaved his burden over the board, dumped it down inside with a bang, and returned, still grinning amiably, to take charge of horse and cart.

"If you want to know t'other from which in our family," said Nuncey, "there's nothing like beginning early. This is Shake."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Father had him christened Shakespeare, but we call him Shake for short. It sounds more natural, somehow. And this here is Robert Burns," she went on, leading the way to the green-painted doorway where the small urchin had resumed his survey of the world beyond home. "That's another of father's inventions; but the poor cheeld pulled down the kettle when he was eighteen months old and scalded hisself all over, so he's gone by his full name ever

since. Mother!" Nuncey called aloud, stepping over the barrier. "Here's the new school-teacher!"

A middle-aged, fair-haired woman, with a benign but puzzled smile, appeared in the passage, holding a baby at the breast.

"You're kindly welcome, my dear; that is, if you'll excuse my hair being in curl-papers. Dear me, now!" Mrs. Benny regarded Hester with a look of honest perplexity. "And I was expectin' an older-lookin' person altogether!"

Hester followed her into a kitchen which, though untidy and dim, struck her as more than passably clean; and it crossed her mind at once that its cleanliness must be due to Nuncey and its untidiness to Mrs. Benny. The dimness was induced by a crowd of geraniums in the window and a large bird-cage blocking out the light above them. A second large bird-cage hung from a rafter in the middle of the ceiling.

"And you've been travellin' all night? You must be pinin' for a dish of tea"—

But here a voice screamed out close to Hester's ear—

"What's your name? What's your name? Oh, rock and roll me over, what's your darned name?"

"Hester Marv—" she had begun to answer in a fright, when Nuncey broke out laughing.

"Don't 'ee be afraid of 'en—'tis only the parrot;" and Hester laughed too, recovering herself at sight of a grey and scarlet bird eyeing her with angry inquisitiveness from the cage over Mrs. Benny's head. Her gaze wandered apprehensively to the second cage by the window.

"Oh, *he* won't speak!" Nuncey assured her. "He's only a cat."

"A cat?"

"Iss. He ate the last parrot afore this one, and I reckon he died of it. Father had 'en stuffed and put 'en in the cage instead. Just go and look for yourself; he's as natural as life."

"I was thinkin' a ham rasher," suggested Mrs. Benny, with her kindly, unsettled smile. "Nuncey, will you hold the baby, or shall I?"

"You give me the frying-pan," commanded Nuncey, turning up her sleeves. "What's the matter with *you*, Robert Burns? And what's become of your manners?" she demanded of the urchin who had followed them in from the passage, and now stood gripping Hester's skirts and gazing up at her, as she in turn gazed up at the absurd cat in the parrot's cage.

"What great eyes she've got!" exclaimed Robert Burns in an awe-stricken voice.

"'All the better to see you with,'" quoted Hester, laughing and looking down on him.

"That's in *Red Riding Hood.* She knows about stories!" The child clapped his hands.

"Well," put in Mrs. Benny, seating herself with a sigh as the ham rasher began to frizzle, "you may say what you like about education, but mothers ought to thank the Lord for it. Sometimes, as 'tis, I feel as if the whole world was on my shoulders, and I can't be responsible for it any longer; but what would happen if 'twasn't for the school bell at nine o'clock there's no knowing. You'd like a wash, my dear?"

"I should indeed," answered Hester.

"Sometimes I loses count," went on Mrs. Benny, not pursuing her invitation, but standing with a far-away gaze bent upon the geraniums in the window; "but there's eleven of 'em, and three buried, and five at school this moment. I began with two boys—two years between each—and then came Nuncey. There's four years between her and Shake, but after that you may allow two years to each again, quite like Jacob's ladder."

"Lord bless 'ee, mother!" interrupted Nuncey, glancing up from the frying-pan, "she don't want to be told I'm singular. She've found out that already. Here's the kettle boilin'—fit and give her a cup of tea, and take her upstairs. 'Tis near upon half-past nine already, and at half-past ten father

was to be here to fetch her across to see Mr. Samuel —though, for my part, I hold 'twould be more Christian to put her to bed and let her sleep the forenoon out."

When Hester descended to breakfast Mr. Benny had already arrived; and he too could not help showing astonishment at her youthful appearance.

"But twenty-five is not so young, after all," she maintained, laughing. "I feel my years, I assure you. Why are you all in conspiracy to add to them?"

"The late Mr. Rosewarne had given us no particulars," began Mr. Benny.

"He wrote at length to me about the school and his hopes for it."

"You knew him, then, Miss Marvin?"

"He was, in a fashion, a friend of my father's. He used to visit us regularly once a year.—But let me show you his letter."

"Not on any account!" Mr. Benny put up a flurried hand. "It—it wouldn't be right." He said it almost sharply. Hester, puzzled to know what offence she had nearly committed, and in some degree hurt by his tone, thrust the letter back in her pocket.

CHAPTER XI

HESTER IS ACCEPTED

"WELL?" Mr. Sam lifted his eyes from his writing-table.

"Miss Marvin has arrived, sir, and is waiting in the morning-parlour," Mr. Benny announced.

"Let her wait a moment. I suppose she takes the line that we've definitely engaged her?"

"I don't know, sir, that she takes what you might call a line; but there's no doubt she believes herself engaged. She talks very frankly, and is altogether a nice, pleasant-spoken young person."

"You didn't happen to find out what my father wrote to her?"

"Of her own accord she offered to show me his letter."

"Well, and what did it say?"

"I didn't read it, sir."

"You didn't read it?" Mr. Sam repeated in slow astonishment.

"No, sir. I felt it wasn't fair to her," said Mr. Benny.

His employer regarded him for a moment with sourly meditative eyes.

"You had best show her in at once," he commanded sharply.

He reseated himself, and did not rise when Hester entered, but slewed his chair around, nodded gloomily in response to her slight bow, and, tapping his knees with a paper-knife, treated her to a long, deliberate stare.

"Take a seat, please."

Hester obeyed with a quiet "Thank you."

"You have come, I believe, in answer to a letter of my father's? Might I ask you what he said, exactly?"

Hester's hand went towards her pocket, but paused. She had taken an instant aversion for this man.

"My father," he went on, noting her hesitation, "has since died suddenly, as you know. His affairs are in some confusion, of course." This was untrue, but Mr. Sam had no consciousness of telling a lie. The phrase was commonly used of dead men's affairs. "In this matter of your engagement, for instance, I am moving in the dark. I can find no record of it among his papers."

"I answered him, sir; but my letter arrived, it seems, after his death. Mr. Benny replied to it."

"Yes, to be sure, I saw your letter, but it did not tell me how far the negotiations had gone."

"You are one of the Managers, sir?"

"Well, not precisely; but you will find that makes little difference. I am to be placed on the Board as my father's successor."

"The offer was quite definite," said Hester calmly. "I would show you the letter, but some parts of it are private."

"Now why in the world was she ready to show it to Benny?" he asked himself. Aloud he said, "You were a friend, then, of my father's? Is it for him, may I ask, that you wear mourning?"

"No, sir; for my own father. Mr. Rosewarne and he were friends—oh, for many years. I asked about it once, when I was quite a girl, and why Mr. Rosewarne came to visit us once every year as he did. My father told me that it had begun in a quarrel, when they were young men; it may have been when my father served in the army, in the barracks at Warwick. I don't remember that he said so, yet somehow I have always had an idea that the quarrel went back to that time; but he said that they had hated one another, and made friends after a long time, and that your father had the most to forgive, being in the wrong. I remember those words, because they sounded so queer to me and I could not understand

them. When I was eighteen, I went out to get my living, and did not see Mr. Rosewarne for many years until the other day, though he came regularly."

"The other day?" Mr. Sam stared at her blankly.

"On the 5th. Mr. Rosewarne always paid his visit on the 5th of June."

"I don't understand you in the least. A minute ago you told me that your father was dead!"

"Yes; he died almost two months ago. But Mr. Rosewarne wrote and asked leave to come, since it was for the last time."

"Your mother entertained him?"

Hester shook her head. "I have no mother. He came as my guest, and that evening—for he never spent more than one night with us—we talked for a long while. He knew, of course, that I was a schoolmistress; and he began to mock at some things in which I believe very deeply. He did it to try me, perhaps. I don't know whether he came meaning to try me, or seeing me alone in the world, and making ready to leave the old home, he suddenly took this notion into his head. At any rate, I did not guess for a moment; and when he spoke scorn of girls' teaching, I answered him—too hotly, I thought at the time; but it seems that he forgave me." She rose. "I have told you all this, sir, because you say you are in the

dark. I am here because Mr. Rosewarne offered me the post. But you seem disposed to deny this; and so in fairness I must consult a friend, if I can find one, or a lawyer perhaps, before showing you the letter."

"Wait a moment, please." Hester's story had held a light as it were, though but a faint one, to an unexplored passage in old Rosewarne's life; and to Mr. Sam every unexplored corner in that life was now to be suspected. "You jump to conclusions, Miss Marvin. I merely meant to say that as my father's executor I have to use reasonable caution. Might I inquire your age? Excuse me, I know that ladies"—

"I am twenty-five," she struck in sharply.

"Married, or unmarried?"

"Unmarried."

"You will excuse me for saying that I am surprised. A young person of your attractiveness"—

"Have you any more questions, sir?"

"Eh?—ah, to be sure! Qualifications?"

Hester briefly enumerated these. He did not appear to be listening, but sat eyeing her abstractedly, while he rattled the point of the paper-knife between his upper and lower teeth.

"Yes, yes—quite satisfactory. Religious views?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Religious views?"

"If you really think that a necessary question, I was baptized and brought up in the Church of England."

"Not a bigoted Churchwoman, I hope?"

"Not bigoted, I certainly hope," Hester answered demurely.

"I feel sure of it," said Mr. Sam, rising gallantly. "In the matter of so-called apostolic succession, for instance"—

But here there came a tap at the door, and Elizabeth Jane, the housemaid, announced that Parson Endicott had called. "Show him in," ordered Mr. Sam promptly, and at the same time—having suddenly made up his mind—he flung Hester an insufferably confidential glance, which seemed to say, "Never mind *him;* you and I are in the same boat."

Parson Endicott suffered from shortness of sight and a high parsonic manner. He paused on the threshold to wipe his eyeglasses, adjusted them on his nose, and gazing around the room, cleared his throat as if about to address a congregation.

"Good-day, parson." Mr. Sam saluted him amiably, still without rising. "You've come in the nick of time. I have just been chatting with Miss Marvin here—our new schoolmistress."

Hester divined that, for some reason, Mr. Samuel

had decided to accept her claim; and that for some reason equally occult he meant to give the clergyman no choice but to accept it.

"Indeed?—er—yes, to be sure, I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Marvin," said Parson Endicott mellifluously, with a glance which seemed to distinguish Hester kindly from the ordinary furniture of the room. This was his habitual way of showing cordial goodwill to his social inferiors, and the poor man had lived to the age of fifty-six without guessing that they invariably saw through it. Having bestowed this glance of kindness upon Hester, he turned to Mr. Sam with another, which plainly asked how far (as one person of importance conferring with another) he might take it that the creature before them was a satisfactory creature.

"You're in luck's way," said Mr. Sam, answering this look. "She's a Churchwoman."

"My dear Mr. Rosewarne"— Parson Endicott pressed the finger-tips of both hands together, holding them in front of his stomach—"I am gratified—deeply gratified; but you must not suppose for one moment—h'm—whatever my faults, I take some credit to myself for broad-mindedness. A Churchwoman, eh?"—he beamed on Hester—"and in other respects, I hope, satisfactory?"

"Quite." Mr. Sam turned to Hester. "Would

you mind running over your qualifications again? To tell the truth, I've forgotten 'em."

Hester, with an acute sense of shame, again rehearsed the list.

"Quite so," said Parson Endicott, who had obviously not been listening. He turned to Mr. Sam with inquiry in his eye. "I think, perhaps—if Miss Marvin"—

"I daresay she won't mind stepping into the next room," said Mr. Sam, turning his back on her, and calmly reseating himself. The parson glanced at Hester with polite inquiry, and, as she bowed, stepped to open the door for her. With head bent to hide the flush on her cheeks, she passed out into the great parlour.

Now the great parlour overlooked the garden through three tall windows, of which Susannah had drawn down the blinds half-way and opened the lower sashes, so that the room seemed to Hester deliciously fresh and cool. It was filled, too, with the fragrance of a jarful of peonies, set accurately in the middle of the long bare table; and she stood for a moment—her sight yet misty with indignant, wounded pride—staring at the reflection of their crimson blooms in the polished mahogany.

These two men were intolerable: and yet they only translated into meaner terms the opinion which

everyone in this strange country seemed to have formed of her. She thought of the young sailor, of Nuncey, of Mr. Benny. All these were simple souls, and patently willing to believe the best of a fellow-creature; yet each in a different way had treated her with suspicion, as though she were here to seek her own interests, and with a selfish disregard of others'. The young sailor had openly and hotly accused her of it. Nuncey and her father, though kind, and even delicately eager to make her welcome, as clearly held some disapproval in reserve—were puzzled somehow to account for her. And she was guiltless. She had come in response to a plain invitation, thinking only of good work to be done. No; what she found intolerable was not these two men, but the whole situation.

She turned with a start. Something had flown in through the open midmost window, and fallen with a thud on the floor a few yards from her feet.

She stepped across and stooped to examine it. It was the upper half of a tattered and somewhat grimy rag doll.

To account for this apparition we must cross the garden, to the summer-house, where Myra and Clem had hidden themselves away from the heat with a book, and, for the twentieth time perhaps, were lost in the adventures of Jack the Tinker and the Giant

Blunderbuss. As a rule Myra would read a portion of the story, and the pair then fell to acting it over together. In this way Clem had slain, in the course of his young life, many scores of giants, wizards, dragons, and other enemies of mankind, his sister the while keeping watch over his blindness, and calling to him when and where to deliver the deadly stroke. But to-day the heat disinclined them for these dramatic exertions, and they sat quiet, even on reaching the point at which Jack the Tinker, his friend Tom, the good-natured giant, and Tom's children, young Tom and Jane, fare forth with slings for their famous hunting.

" 'They soon knocked down as many kids, hares, and rabbits as they desired. They caught some colts, placed the children on two of them and the game on the others, and home they went.' "

Myra glanced up at Clem, for this was a passage which ever called to him like a trumpet. But to-day Clem spread out both hands, protesting.

" 'On their return, whilst waiting for supper, Jack wandered around the castle, and was struck by seeing a window which he had not before observed. Jack was resolved to discover the room to which this window belonged; so he very carefully noticed its position and then threw his hammer in through it, that he might be certain of the spot when he found

his tool inside the castle. The next day, after dinner'—

"Wait a moment, Clem dear!"

"Oh, but we *must!*" Clem had jumped to his feet.

"It's too dreadfully hot. Very well, then; but wait for the end.

"'The next day, after dinner, when Tom was having his snooze, Jack took Tom's wife Jane with him, and they began a search for the hammer near the spot where Jack supposed the window should be; but they saw no signs of one in any part of the walls. They discovered, however, a strangely fashioned worm-eaten oak hanging-press. They carefully examined this, but found nothing. At last Jack, striking the back of it with his fist, was convinced from the sound that the wall behind it was hollow. He and Jane went steadily to work, and with some exertion they moved the press aside and disclosed a stone door. They opened this, and there was Jack's hammer lying amidst a pile of bones, evidently the relics of some of old Blunderbuss's wives, whom he had imprisoned in the wall and left to perish there!'"

Myra shut the book with a slam, and, groping beneath the seat of the summer-house, found and handed to Clem the torso of an old rag doll, which, because it might be thrown against a window without

breaking the glass, served as their wonted substitute for the Tinker's hammer.

"O-oh!" cried Myra, clutching at Clem and drawing him back from the sudden apparition in the window; and so for a dozen seconds she and Hester stared at one another.

"Good-morning!"

"Good-morning!" Myra hesitated a moment. "Though I don't know who you are. Oh, but yes I do! You're the new teacher, and it's no use your pretending."

"Am I pretending?" asked Hester.

"Yes; but I know what to do." The child nodded her head defiantly and made an elaborate sign of the cross, first over Clem and then upon the front of her own bodice. "That's against witches," she announced.

"Please don't take me for a witch!" It was absurd, but really Hester began to wonder where these misunderstandings would end. The look, too, on the boy's face puzzled her.

"I always wondered," said Myra, unmoved, "if the new teacher would turn out a witch. Witches always start by making themselves into young and beautiful ladies; that's their trick. Whoever heard of a teacher being a young and beautiful lady?"

"Well," answered Hester, between a sigh and a smile, "a compliment's a compliment, however it comes. I am the witch, then; and who may you be? —Hansel and Grethel, I suppose? I don't think, though, that Hansel really believes me a witch, by the way he's looking at me."

"He isn't looking at you at all. Come away, Clem!" She led the boy away by the hand, which he gave to her obediently, but left him when half-way across the turf and came swiftly back. "He wasn't looking at you. He's blind."

"Ah, poor child! I am sorry—please tell me your name, and believe that I am sorry."

"If you were sorry, you'd go away, and not come teaching here." Myra delivered this Parthian shaft over her shoulder as she walked off. At the same moment Hester heard a door open in the room behind her, and Parson Endicott came forth from the counting-house.

"Ah—er—Miss Marvin"— He paused with a lift of his eyebrows at the sight of the rag doll in Hester's hand. She, on her part, felt a sudden hysterical desire to laugh wildly.

"It—it isn't mine!" she managed to say in a faint voice and with a catch in her throat.

"I had not supposed so," Parson Endicott answered gravely. "I came to tell you, Miss Marvin,

that Mr. Samuel Rosewarne and I have agreed to recognise your claim. By so doing we shall be piously observing his father's wishes, and—er—I anticipate no opposition from my fellow-members on the Board. The school—you have already paid it a visit, perhaps? No? It will, I venture to think, exceed your expectations. The school is furnished and ready. I suggest—if the other Managers consent—that we open it formally on Tuesday next, with a short religious service, consecrating, so to speak, your future labours. Yours is a wonderful sphere of usefulness, Miss Marvin; and may I say what pleasure it gives me to learn that you are a Churchwoman. A regular communicant, I hope?"

Hester was silent. She disliked this man, and saw no reason to be hurried into making any confession to him.

"It is a point upon which I am accustomed to lay great stress. In these days, with schismatics on all hands to contend against, it behoves all members of the true Church to show a bold and united front." He leaned his head on one side and looked at her interrogatively. "Do you play the harmonium?" he asked.

But at this point Mr. Sam thrust his head out through the counting-house doorway, and the parson coughed discreetly, as much as to say that the answer might wait.

"Well, Miss Marvin," said Mr. Sam jocosely, "we've fixed it up for you between us!"

Hester thanked them both briefly, and wished them good-day.

"She dresses respectably," said the parson, when the two were left alone. "I detect a certain earnestness in her, though I cannot say as yet how far it is based on genuine religious principles."

"She is more comely than I expected," said Mr. Sam.

At the ferry Hester found Nuncey awaiting her with a boat-load of the Benny children.

"I reckoned you'd be here just-about-now," Nuncey hailed her. "Come'st along for a bathe wi' the children! I've a-brought a bathin' suit for 'ee."

"But I can't swim," Hester answered in alarm, and added, as she stepped into the boat, "Nuncey, don't laugh at me, but until to-day I had never seen the sea in my life."

Nuncey looked her up and down quizzically. "And I've never seen Lunnon! Never mind, my dear; 'tisn' too late to begin. There's none of this crew knows how to swim but me and Tenny here," she pointed out a boy of eleven or twelve. "We'll just row out to harbour's mouth; there's a cove where we can put the littlest ones to paddle. And after that I'll

larn 'ee how to strike out and use your legs, if you've a mind to. It'll do 'ee good to kick a bit, I'll wage, after a dose of Mister Sam. Well, and how did you like 'en?"

"I didn't like him at all." Hester almost broke down. "Please, Nuncey, be good to me! It—it seems as everyone was banded against me to-day, to think badly of me."

"Be good to 'ee? Why, to be sure I will! Sit 'ee down and unlace your boots, while me and Tenny pulls. Care killed the cat—'cos why? He wouldn't wash it off in salt water."

They rowed down past the quays and out beyond the ancient fort at the harbour's mouth. On the opposite shore a reef of rock ran out, and on the ridge stood a white wooden cross, "put up," so Nuncey informed her, "because Pontius Pilate landed here one time." Beyond this ridge they found a shingly beach secluded from the town, warmed by the full rays of the westering sun. There they undressed, one and all, and for half an hour were completely happy. To be sure, Hester's happiness contained a fair admixture of fright when Nuncey took her hand and led her out till the water rose more than waist-high about her.

"Now trust to me; lean forward, and see if you can't lift your feet off the ground," said Nuncey, slip-

ping a hand under her breast. Hester tried her hardest to be brave, and although no swimming was accomplished that day, the trial ended in peals of laughter. She splashed ashore at length, gleeful, refreshed in body and mind, and resolved to make herself as good a swimmer as Nuncey, who swam like a duck.

CHAPTER XII

THE OPENING DAY

It often happens, when a number of persons meet together for some purpose in itself unselfish, that there prevails in the assembly a spirit of its own, recognisably good, surprising even the pettiest with a sudden glow in their hearts, and a sudden revelation that the world is a cheerfuller place than in their daily lives they take it for. This cheerful congregational spirit I take to flow from a far deeper source than the emotion, for example, which a great preacher commands in his audience. It may be—indeed, usually is—accompanied by very poor oratory. The occasion may be trivial as you please; that it be unselfish will suffice to unlock the goodness within men, who, if often worse than they believe, and usually than they make believe, are always better than they know.

This spirit prevailed at the school opening, and because of it Hester felt happy and confident during the little function, and ever afterwards remembered it with pleasure. For the moment Church and Dissent seemed to forget their meannesses and jealousies. The morning sun shone without; the breeze played through the open windows with a thousand hedge-

row scents; the two score of children ranged by their desks, fresh-faced and in their cleanest clothes, suggested thoughts innocent and deep as the gospel story; and if Parson Endicott was long-winded, and Mr. Sam spoke tunelessly and accompanied his performance on the bones, so to speak—that is, by pulling at his knuckles till the joints cracked—consolation soon followed. For third and last came the turn of the Inspector, who had halted on his progress through the county to attend a ceremony of the kind in which he took delight. He had lately been transferred from the Charity Commission to this new work, and it fell to him at a time when the selfish ambitions die down, and in their place, if a man's heart be sound, there springs up a fatherly tenderness for the young, with a passionate desire to help them. Hester could not guess that this grave and courteous gentleman, grey-haired, clean shaven, scholarly in his accent, neat even to primness in his dress, spoke with a vision before him of an England to be made happy by making its children happy, that the roots of the few simple thoughts he uttered were watered by ideal springs—

> "I will not cease from mental fight,
> Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
> Till we have built Jerusalem
> In England's green and pleasant land."

Simple as the thoughts were, and directly spoken, the children gazed at him with set faces, not appearing to kindle with any understanding; and yet, after the manner of children, they were secreting a seed here and there, to germinate in their dark little minds later on, as in due time Hester discovered. She herself, seated at the harmonium, felt a lift of the heart and mist gathering over her sight at the close of his quiet peroration, and a tear fell as she stretched out her hands over the opening chords of the "Old Hundredth." All sang it with a will, and Parson Endicott with an unction he usually reserved for "The Church's One Foundation."

With a brief prayer and the benediction the ceremony ended, and while the elders filed out the Inspector walked over for a few words with Hester.

"Ever since I learnt your name, Miss Marvin—excuse me, it is not a common one—I have been wanting to ask you a question. I used to have an old friend—Jeremy Marvin—who lived at Warwick, and found for me some scores of old books in his time. I was wondering"—

"He was my father, sir."

"Indeed? Then, please, you must let me shake hands with his daughter. Yes, yes"—with a glance down at her black skirt—"I heard of his death, and with a real sense of bereavement."

"I have addressed and posted many a parcel to you, sir, in the days before I left home to earn my living."

"And you weren't going to tell me that? You left me to find out—yes, yes; 'formidable Inspector,' and that sort of thing, eh? I'm not an ogre, though. Now this little discovery has just put the finishing touch to a delightful morning!"

Hester, encouraged by his smile, laughed merrily, and so did he; less at the spoken words than because of the good gladness brimming their hearts.

"But tell me," he went on, becoming serious again, "if a child, out of shyness, hid from you a small secret of that sort, you would be sorry—eh? And you would rightly be sorry, because by missing that little of his entire trust you had by so much fallen short of being a perfect teacher."

"And two of these children," thought Hester, with a glance at Clem and Myra, "solemnly believe I am a witch!"

As the Inspector went down the hill towards the ferry, he overtook another and older acquaintance in an old college friend. This was Sir George Dinham of Troy, who had attended the ceremony uninvited, and greatly to the awe of everyone assembled—the Inspector and Hester alone excepted. Indeed, his

presence had bidden fair at the start to upset the proceedings; for Parson Endicott and Mr. Sam had both approached him hat in hand, and begged him, not without servility, to preside. This proposal he had declined with his habitual shy, melancholy smile, and shrunk away to a back row of the audience. In his great house over Troy he lived a recluse: a scholar, a childless man, the last of his race, rarely seen by the townsfolk, of whom two-thirds at least were his tenants. He had heard of the Inspector's coming, and some ray of remembered affection had enticed him forth from his shell, to listen. Now, at the sound of the Inspector's footstep on the road behind him, he turned and waited, leaning on his stick. The two men had not met since a Commemoration Ball when young Dinham led his friend proudly up to a beautiful girl, his bride that was to be. She died a bare six weeks later; and from that day her lover had buried himself with his woe.

"George!"

"How d'ye do, Jack? I had to turn out to listen, you see—*ecce quam sempiterna vox juventutis!* You have improved on your old debating style, having, as I gather, found belief."

The Inspector flushed. "Ah, you gathered that?"

"Yes, I haven't lost the knack of understanding

those I once understood. Not that it needed anything of the sort. Man, you were admirably straight—and gentle, too—you that used to be intolerant. You mustn't think, though, that I'm convinced; I can't afford to be."

"You mean—?"

"I mean that, if you are right, I ought to be a sun worshipper, and sit daily at dawn on top of my tower yonder, warming my hands against the glow of children's faces, trooping to school. Whereas the little beggars run wild and rob my orchards, and I don't remember at this moment my parish schoolmaster's name."

The Inspector bethought him of the broken bridge in his friend's life—the bridge by which men cross over from self into love of a new generation—and was silent.

"But look here," Sir George went on, "the fun was your preaching the doctrine in that temple. You didn't know the man who built it. He died a week or two ago; a man of character, I tell you, and a big fellow, too, in his way."

"I have heard of this Rosewarne. All I know of him is that he's to be thanked for the best-fitted school, for its size, in all Cornwall. I'm not talking of expense merely; he used thought, down to the details. When you begin to study these things,

you recognise thought, down to the raising or lowering of a desk, or the screws in a cupboard. You don't get your fittings right by giving *carte blanche* to a wholesale firm."

"Of course you don't. But what, think you, had the man in view? I tell you, Jack, you are a fossil beside him. You talk of making good citizens, quite in the old Hellenic style. Oh yes, I recognised the incurable Aristotle in your exhortation, though you *did* address it to two score of rustic British children. But, my dear fellow, you are a philosopher in a barbarian's court, and your barbarian has been reading his Darwin. Where you see a troop of little angels"—

"*Non Angeli sed Angli*," the Inspector put in, with a smile.

"Where you behold a vision, then, of little English citizens growing up to serve the State, he saw a horde of little struggle-for-lifers climbing on each other's backs; and these fellows—that son of his, and the parson—will follow his line by instinct. They don't reason; but Darwin and the rest have flung them on the scent of selfishness, and they have a rare nose for self. Struggle-for-life or struggle-for-creed, the scent is the same, and they're hot upon it."

"Think of these last fifty years of noble reform. Is England going back upon herself—upon the spirit,

for instance, that raised Italy, freed the slave, and cared for the factory child?"

"To be sure she will. She has found a creed to vindicate the human brute, and the next generation—mark my words—will be predatory. Within twenty years we shall be told that it is inevitable the weak should suffer to enrich the strong; we shall accept the assurance, and our poets will hymn it passionately."

"If that day should ever come, we can still die fighting it. But I trust to Knowledge to do her own work. You remember that sentence in the *Laws*, 'Many a victory has been and will be suicidal to the victors, but education is never suicidal'? Nor will you persuade me easily that the new mistress up yonder"—the Inspector nodded back at the school building—"is going to train her children to be little beasts of prey."

"The girl with the Madonna face? No; you're right there. But the Managers will find a short way with her; she'll go."

"She turns out to be the daughter of an old friend of mine, Marvin of Warwick, the second-hand bookseller."

"Marvin? Jeremiah Marvin? Why, I must have received his catalogues by the score."

"Jeremy," his friend corrected him. "He was

christened Jeremiah, to be sure, and told me once it was the handiest name on earth, and could be made to express anything, 'from the lugubrious, sir, to the rollicking. In my young days, sir,'—for he had been a soldier in his time—'I was Corporal Jerry. Corporal Jerry Marvin! How's that for a name? Jeremiah I hold in reserve against the blows of destiny or promotion to a better world. But Jeremy, sir, as I think you'll allow, is the only wear for a second-hand bookseller.' A whimsical fellow!"

"He is dead, then?"

"Yes, he died a few weeks since; and poorly-off, I'm afraid. He had a habit of reading the books he vended. Look here, George"—the Inspector halted in the middle of the roadway—"I want you to do me a favour, or rather, to promise one."

"What is it?"

"I want you to promise that, if these fellows get rid of Miss Marvin, you will see that she suffers no harsh treatment from them. I can find her another post, no doubt; but there may be an interval in which you can help."

"Very well," Sir George answered, after a pause. "I can manage that. But they'll eject her, you may bet."

CHAPTER XIII

TOM TREVARTHEN INTERVENES

When the company had departed Hester arranged her small troop at their desks—boys and girls and "infants"—and made them a speech. It was a very short speech, asking for their affection, and somehow she found herself addressing it to Myra, whose dark eyes rested on her with a stare of unyielding suspicion. On hearing that the two children were to attend the Board School, Aunt Purchase had broken out into vehement protest, the exact purport of which Myra did not comprehend. But she gathered that a wrong of some kind was being done to her and (this was more important) to Clem, and she connected it with the loss of their liberty. Until this moment she had known no schooling. Her grandmother in stray hours had taught her the alphabet and some simple reading, and the rest of her knowledge she had picked up for herself. She well remembered the last of these stray hours. It fell on a midsummer evening, three years before, when she and Clem—then a child of four—had spent a long day riding to

and fro in the hay waggons. Now Mrs. Rosewarne for the last few years of her life, and indeed ever since Myra could remember, had been a cripple, confined to the house or to her small garden, save only when she entered an ancient covered vehicle (called "the Car") and was jogged into Liskeard to visit her dressmaker, or over to Damelioc to attend one of Lady Killiow's famous rose fêtes. It was the hour of sunset, then, and in the shadow of the hedge old Pleasant, the waggon-horse, having Clem on his back, stood tethered, released from his work, contentedly cropping the rank grass between the clusters of meadow-sweet, and whisking his tail to brush off the flies. The horse-flies had been pestilent all day, and Myra was weaving a frontlet of green hazel twigs to slip under Pleasant's headstall, when she happened to turn and caught sight of her grandmother standing by the upper gate, leaning on her ivory-headed staff, and shading her eyes against the level sun. No one ever knew how the old lady had found strength to walk the distance from the house—for walked it she had. It may have been that some sudden fright impelled her; some unreasoning panic for the children's safety. Old Rosewarne, seated on horseback and watching the rickmakers in the far corner, caught sight of her, cantered across to the gate, dismounted there, and led her home on his arm, and the chil-

dren had followed. So far as Myra could remember, nothing came of this apparition—nothing except that she found herself, a little later, seated in her grandmother's dressing-room and reading aloud; and this must have happened soon after they reached home, for while she read she heard the fowls settling themselves to roost in the hen-house beneath the open window. Three weeks later Mrs. Rosewarne was dead, had faded out like a shadow; and since then the children had run wild, no one constraining them to tasks.

She sat with eyes fixed sullenly on Hester, and fingers ready at any moment to make the sign of the cross. To the other children she paid no heed; they were merely so many victims entrapped, ready to be changed into birds and put into cages, as in *Jorinda and Jorindel.* 'Why was this woman separating the girls from the boys? She should not take away Clem. Let her try!' Hester had too much tact. Having marshalled the others, she set a pen and copy-book before Myra, and bending over Clem, asked him in the gentlest voice to sit and wait; she would come back to him in a moment (she promised) and with a pretty game for him to play.

"Don't you listen to a single word she says," Myra whispered; but Clem had already taken his seat.

Hester had sent for a book of letters in raised type for the blind boy. Before setting him down to this, however, she wished to try the suppleness and accuracy of his touch with some simple reed-plaiting.

The reeds lay within the cupboard across the room. She went to fetch them, and at this moment the schoolroom door opened behind her.

She heard the lift of the latch, and turned with a smile. But the smile faded almost at once as she recognised her visitor. It was Tom Trevarthen, and he entered with a grin and a defiant, jaunty swagger which did not at all become him.

In an instant she scented danger, and felt her cheeks paling; but she lifted her head none the less, looking him straight in the eyes.

"I beg your pardon. Are you in search of someone?"

"Seems I'm too late for the speechifying," said the young sailor, avoiding her gaze, and winking at two or three elder boys on the back benches. "Well, never mind; must do a little speechifyin' of my own, I suppose. By your leave, miss," he added, seating himself on the end of a form and fanning himself with his seaman's cap, which he had duly doffed on entering.

"I think," said Hester quietly, and prayed that he might not hear the tremble in her voice, "I think

you have come on purpose to annoy, and that you do not like the business."

"It's this way, miss. I've no grudge at all against *you*, except to wonder how such a gentle-spoken young lady can have the heart to come here ruinin' an old 'ooman that never done you a ha'p'orth of harm in her life." He was looking at her firmly now, with a rising colour in his tan cheeks, and Hester's heart sank as she noted his growing confidence. "But I've told 'ee that a'ready," he said, and turned to the boys again. "What I wonder at more is *you*, Billy Sweet—an' *you*, Dave Polseath—an' *you*, Rekkub Johns—that'll be growin' up for men in a year or two. Seems to me there's some spirit gone out o' this here parish since I used to be larrupped for minchin'. Seems to me a passel o' boys in my day would have had summat to say afore they sat here quiet, helpin' to steal the bread out of an old 'ooman's mouth, an' runnin' to heel for a furriner."

The boys glanced at one another and grinned, then at the intruder, lastly at Hester. Her look held them, and some habit of discipline learnt from the old woman they were being invited to champion. One or two began shuffling in their seats.

But it was Myra who led the rebellion. She stepped to Tom's side at once, and cried she, point-

ing a finger at Hester, "She's a witch! Look at her—she's a witch! I know now why Aunt Hannah called it a burning shame. She's robbing Mother Butson, and she's a witch and ought to be burnt. Come along, Clem!"

Hester, turning from the child between pain and disgust, intent only on holding the bigger boys in check while she could, did not note that Clem made no movement to obey his sister.

"Well done, Miss Myra!—though you needn't talk vindictive. There's no need to harm *her*. Now look here, boys! Mother Butson gives you a holiday, and sent me up with the message. What do 'ee say to it?"

"Stop!" Hester lifted a hand against the now certain mutiny. "Your name is Trevarthen, I believe?"

"Tom Trevarthen, miss."

"Then, Tom Trevarthen, you are a poor coward. Now do your worst and go your way. You have heard the truth."

"'Tidn' best a man said that to me," answered Tom, with a lowering brow.

"A man?" she replied, with a short laugh of contempt which in her own ears sounded like a sob. "There were men here just now; but you waited till they were gone!"

"No, miss; I did not, you'll excuse me. I only knew the school was to open to-day. I came ashore half an hour ago, and walked up here across the fields." He stood for a second or two meditatively twisting his round cap between his hands. "We'll play fair, though," he said, and faced round on the benches. "Sorry to disappoint 'ee, boys, but you must do without your holiday, after all. This here is a man's job, as Miss Marvin says, and 'tis for men to settle it. Only"—he turned upon Hester again—"you must name your man quick. My ship sails early in the week; let alone that there's cruel wrong being done, and the sooner 'tis righted the better."

Hester's hand went up to her throat. Was this extraordinary youth actually proposing a wager of battle? His eyes rested on hers seriously; his demeanour had become entirely courteous.

"Ah," she gasped, "but cannot you see that the mischief is done! You behave shamefully, and now you talk childishly. You have made these children disloyal, and what hold can I have on them except through their loyalty? You have thrown me back at the start—I cannot bear to think how far—and you talk as if some foolish violence could mend this for me! Please—please go away! I have no patience to argue with you."

"Yes, go away!" broke in a shrill treble voice. It was Clem's. The child had risen from his bench and stood up, gripping the desk in front and trembling.

"Clem dear, you don't understand"— began Myra.

"Yes, I do understand!" For the first time in his life his will clashed with hers. "Tom Trevarthen is wrong, and ought to go away."

"She's a nasty, deceitful witch!"

"She's not a witch!" The child's eyes turned towards Hester, as if seeking to behold her and be assured. "You're not a witch, are you?" he asked; and at the question Hester's tears, so long held back, brimmed over.

Before she could answer him the door opened, and Mr. Sam stood in the entry with Mrs. Purchase close behind his shoulder, in a sky-blue and orange bonnet.

"Eh? Hullo! what's all this?" demanded Mr. Sam, staring around the schoolroom; and Mrs. Purchase, bustling in and mopping her face, paused too to stare.

For a moment no one spoke. Mr. Sam's eyes passed over Tom Trevarthen in slow, indignant wonder, and rested on Hester's flushed cheeks and tear-reddened lids.

"Why, whatever on earth is Tom Trevarthen doin' here?" cried Mrs. Purchase.

"I've a-come here, ma'am," spoke up Tom, kindling, "to say a word against a cruel shame; for shame it is, to take the food away from a poor old 'ooman's mouth!"

"Meanin' Mother Butson?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"An' your way to set things right is to come here and browbeat a poor girl before the children till her eyes be pink as garden daisies! Go'st 'way home, thou sorry fool! I'm ashamed of 'ee!"

"As for that, ma'am, I did wrong," Tom admitted sullenly, "and I beg her pardon for't. But it don't alter the hurt to Mother Butson."

"You're mistaken, my friend," broke in Mr. Sam, in his rasping voice. "To be sure you haven't closed Mother Butson's school for her, because 'tis closed already. Twopence a week is the lowest she could ever charge, to earn a living, and I leave to judge how many sensible folks will be paying twopence a week for her ignorance when they can get sound teaching up here for a penny. But a worse thing you've done for her. She lodges with your mother, I believe? Very well; you can go home and tell your mother to get rid of her lodger. Eh, what are you staring at?"

The young man had fallen back, and stared from face to face, incredulous. There was a bewildered horror in his eyes, and it cut Hester to the heart. Her own eyes sank as he challenged them.

"No, Sam—no!" Mrs. Purchase interposed. "Don't 'ee go to punish the lad that way. He've made a mistake; but he's a well-meanin' lad for all, and I'll wage he'll tell you he's sorry."

"Well-meaning, is it, to come here bullying a young lady? Sorry, is he? I promise he'll be sorrier before I've done. Answer me, sir. Did Mrs. Butson know of your visit here to-day?"

"I told her I was coming," Tom answered dully.

"That settles it. Heaven is my witness," said Mr. Sam, with sudden unction, "I was willing to let the old woman wind up her affairs in peace. But mutiny I don't stand, nor molesting. You go home, sir, to your mother, and tell her my words. I give her till Saturday"—

The words ended in a squeal as Tom, with a sharp intake of breath like a sob, sprang and gripped him by the throat, bearing him back and overturning Hester's desk with a crash. One or two of the girls began to scream. The boys scrambled on top of their forms, craning, round-eyed with excitement. The little ones stood up with white faces shrieking with

terror, as Hester ran and placed herself between them and the struggle.

"You cur! You miserable—dirty—cur!" panted Tom, shaking Mr. Sam to and fro. "Leave me alone, missus!"—for Mrs. Purchase was attempting to clutch him by the collar. "Leave me deal with him, I tell you! Stand clear, there!"

With a sharp thrust he loosened his hold, and Mr. Sam went flying backwards, missed his footing, and fell, his head striking the corner of a form with a thud.

"Get up! Up on your legs, and have it out like a man!"

But Mr. Sam lay where he had fallen in a heap, with the blood oozing from an ugly cut across the left temple.

"Get up?" vociferated Mrs. Purchase. "Lucky for you if he ever gets up! You've gone nigh to killing 'en, mean it or no. Out of my sight, you hot-headed young fool! Be off to the ship, pack up your kit, and run. 'Tis a jailin' matter, this; and now you've done for yourself as well as your mother."

For a moment the young man stared at her, not seeming to comprehend. "Eh, missus?" he muttered. "Be you agen' me too?"

Mrs. Purchase positively laughed, and a weird cackling sound it made in Hester's ears as she bent

to support one of the smaller girls, who had fainted. "Agen' you? Take an' look around on your mornin's work! You've struck down my brother's son, Tom Trevarthen—isn't that enough? Go an' pack your kit; I'll have no jail-birds aboard my ship."

He turned and went. On the way his foot encountered Mr. Sam's tall silk hat, and he kicked it viciously through the doorway before him.

"Tom!"

Until the call had been repeated twice behind him Tom Trevarthen did not hear. When, after a stupid stare at his hands (as though there had been blood on his knuckles), he turned to the voice, he saw Myra speeding bareheaded to overtake him. She beckoned him to stop.

"What will you do, Tom?" she panted, as he waited for her to come up.

"Me, missy? Well, I hadn't given it a thought; but now you mention it, I s'pose I'd better cut. 'Tis a police job, most like, as your aunt said. But never you mind for me."

The name of the police sounded terribly in Myra's ears.

"The *Good Intent* will be sailing to-night; I heard Peter Benny say so," she suggested; "and the *Mary Rowett* to-morrow, if the weather holds."

Tom Trevarthen nodded. "That's so, missy. Old man Hancock of the *Good Intent* wants a hand, to my knowledge. I'll try 'en, or else walk to Falmouth. Don't you fret for me," he repeated.

They had reached the gate of Hall, over which a gigantic chestnut spread its branches. As Myra faced Tom Trevarthen a laugh sounded overhead; and, looking up, she saw Master Calvin's legs and elastic-sided boots depending from a green bough.

"Hullo, Myra!" Master Calvin called down. "How d'you get on up at the Board School?"

"*He* don't go to Board School," said Tom Trevarthen, jerking his thumb up towards the bough. "In training to be a gentleman, *he* is; not like Master Clem. Well, good-bye, missy!"

Myra watched him down the road, and, as he disappeared at the bend, flung a glance up at the chestnut tree.

"Come down," she commanded, in no loud voice, but firmly.

"Shan't."

"What are you doing up there?" She sniffed the air, her sense of smell alive to a strange scent in it. "You nasty, horrid boy, you're smoking!"

"I'm not," answered Master Calvin untruthfully, concealing a pipe. "I'm up here pretending to be Zacchæus."

Myra without more ado pushed open the gate and went up the path to the house. In less than two minutes she was back again.

"Come down."

"Shan't."

"Very well. I'm going to Zacchæus you."

"What's that in your hand?"

"It's grandfather's powder-flask; and I've a box of matches, too."

CHAPTER XIV

MR. SAM IS MAGNANIMOUS

HESTER'S cupboard contained a small case of plasters, lint, ointments, etc., for childish cuts and bruises. She despatched a couple of boys to the playground pump to fetch water, and then glanced at Mrs. Purchase interrogatively.

"Better send for a doctor, I suppose?" said Mrs. Purchase.

"I think, if we bathe the wound, we can tell better what's necessary. Will *you*—?"

"I reckon the job's more in your line. You've the look o' one able to nurse—yes, and you've the trick of it, I see," Mrs. Purchase went on, as Hester knelt, lifted the sufferer's head, and motioned to the boys to set down their basin of water beside her. "I'll clear the children out to the playground and keep 'em quiet. Call, if you want anything; I'll be close outside." The good lady shepherded them forth with brisk authority; not for nothing had she commanded a ship these thirty years. "But, Lord!" she

muttered, "to think of me playing schoolmistress! What'll I do, I wonder, if these varmints of boys break ship and run home?"

She might have spared herself this anxiety. The children were all agog to see the drama out. Would Mr. Samuel recover? And, if not, what would be done to Tom Trevarthen? They discussed this in eager groups. If any of them had an impulse to run downhill and cry the news through the village, Mrs. Purchase's determined slamming and bolting of the playground gate restrained it—that, and perhaps a thought that by running with the news they would start the hue-and-cry after Tom.

Hester, having sponged away the blood, found that the cut on Mr. Sam's temple was nothing to need a doctor, but could be set right by cleansing and a few strips of plaster. Doubtless the fall had stunned him, and doubtless he must be in some pain. Yet when at length he groaned and opened his eyes she could not repress a suspicion (although she hated herself for it) that in some degree he had been shamming.

"Do not move, please," she commanded gently, snipping at the plaster with her scissors. "A couple of strips more, then a bandage, and you will soon be feeling better."

His eyes rolled and fixed themselves on her. "A ministering angel," he muttered. She caught

the words, and turned her head aside with a flush of annoyance.

"You have an ugly bruise," she told him sharply. "I am going to put a cold compress on it. You had better close your eyes, or some of the water will be trickling into them."

He closed them obediently, but asked, "He has gone?"

"Yes."

"Then *you* are safe at least, thank God!"

Yes, he had taken his hurt in protecting her; and yet something in his tone caused her to glance, and as if for protection, to the doorway.

"You are comely," he went on slowly, opening his eyes again, and again rolling that embarrassing gaze upon her. "Your fingers, too, have the gift of healing."

She could not tell him with what repugnance she brought them to touch him. Having fastened the bandage firmly, she turned again to the doorway to summon Mrs. Purchase, but checked herself.

"I want to ask you a favour," she began in a hesitating voice.

"You may ask it confidently."

"I want you to forgive—no, not forgive; that is the wrong word—to be generous, and not to punish."

Mr. Samuel blinked. "Let him off?" he asked. "Why? What's your motive?"

"I don't know that there's any motive." She met his eyes frankly enough, but with a musing air as if considering a new suggestion. "No; it's just a wish, no more. An hour ago it seemed to me that everyone was eager and happy; that there would always be pleasure in looking back upon our opening day." Her voice trembled a little. "Now this has happened, to spoil all; and yet something may be saved if we bear no malice, but take up the work again, and show that we waste no time or thought on punishment, being determined only to win."

"You are asking a great deal of me," he answered. Nevertheless he had instantly resolved to grant her wish, and for many reasons. "I suppose you know the matter is serious enough for a warrant? Still, if I shall oblige you by declining to prosecute"—

"But please don't put it in that way!" she interrupted.

"I really don't see how else to put it." He paused, as if requiring her to suggest a better. "The point is, you want me to let the fellow off—eh? Well then, I will."

"Thank you," said Hester, with a sigh.

Mr. Sam smiled. After being shaken like a rat,

a man needs to retrieve his self-respect, and he was retrieving his famously. He could see himself in a magnanimous light: he had laid the girl under an obligation; he had avoided public action which would, to be sure, have given him revenge, but at much cost of dignity; and, for the rest, he had still plenty of ways to get even with Master Tom Trevarthen.

Hester had a mind to tell him that he misconstrued her; that merely to abstain from pursuing the lad with warrant or summons neither fulfilled her request nor touched the kernel of it. But while she cast about for words Mrs. Purchase thrust a cheerful head in at the doorway.

"Hullo, that's famous!" she exclaimed at sight of the bandaging. "You're a clever woman, my dear; and now I'll ask you to bring your cleverness outside here and take these children off my hands. W'st, you little numskulls!"—she turned and addressed them—"keep quiet, I say, with your mountains out of molehills! There's no one killed nor hurt; only a foolish lad lost his temper, and he'll smart for it, and I hope it'll be a warning to you." She poked her head in through the doorway again. "Come along, Sam, and show yourself. And as for you, my dear," she went on hurriedly, lowering her voice, "better get 'em back to their work as if nought

had happened. I'll bide a while with you till you have 'em in hand again."

"Thank you," said Hester; "but that wouldn't help me in the long-run. I must manage them alone."

"You mean that?"

"Yes; but I thank you none the less."

"And you're right. You're a plucky woman." She turned to Mr. Sam briskly. "Well, take my arm and put on as light a face as you can. Here's your hat—I've smoothed out the worst of the dents. Eh? Bain't goin' to make a speech, surely!"

Mr. Sam, leaning slightly on his aunt's arm, pulled himself up on the threshold and surveyed the children's wondering faces.

"Boys and girls," he said, "our opening day has been spoilt by a scene on which I won't dwell, because I desire you not to dwell on it. If you treat it lightly, as I intend to do, bearing no malice, we shall show the world all the more clearly that we are in earnest about things which really matter."

He cleared his throat and looked around with a challenging smile at Hester, who watched him, wondering to hear her own words so cleverly repeated.

"We wish," he proceeded, "to remember our opening day as a pleasant one. Miss Marvin especially wishes to look back on it with pleasure; and I think we all ought to help her. Now if I say no

more about this foolish young man—whom I could punish very severely—will you promise me to go back to your books? To-day, as you know, is a half-holiday; but there remains an hour for work before you disperse. I want your word that you will employ it well, and honestly try to do all that Miss Marvin tells you."

He paused again, and chose to take a slight murmur among the children for their assent.

"I thank you. There is an old saying that he who conquers himself performs a greater feat than he who takes a city. Some of us, Miss Marvin, may hereafter associate the lesson with this our opening day."

He seemed to await some reply to this; but Hester could not speak, even to thank him. Her spirit recoiled from him; she could not reconcile egoism so inordinate with such cleverness in turning it to account. She watched him with a certain fascination, as one watches some trained monster in a show displaying its deformity for public applause. He shook hands with her and made his exit, not without dignity, leaning on Mrs. Purchase's arm and turning at the playground gate to wave farewell.

It is doubtful if the children understood his speech. But they were awed. At the word of command they trooped into school, settled themselves at

their desks, and took up their interrupted lessons with a docility at which Hester wondered, since for the moment she herself had lost all power to interest or amuse them.

For her that was a dreadful hour. A couple of humble-bees zoomed against the window pane, and the sound, with the ticking of the schoolroom clock, took possession of her brain. Z-zoom! Tick-tack, tick-tack! Would lesson-time never come to an end? She went about automatically correcting sums, copies, exercises, because the sight of the pencilled words or figures steadied her faculties, whereas she felt that if she called the children up in class her wits would wander and all answers come alike to her, right or wrong. Her will, too, had fallen into a strange drowsiness. She wanted the window open, to get rid of the humble-bees; a word to one of the elder boys and it would be done. Yet the minutes passed and the word remained unspoken. So a sick man will lie and debate with himself so small a thing as the lifting of a hand.

At length the clock hands pointed to five minutes to noon. She ordered books to be shut and slates to be put away; and going to the harmonium, gave out the hymn, "Lord, dismiss us with Thy blessing." The Managers had agreed upon this hymn; the Nonconformist majority insisting, however, that the con-

cluding " Amen " should be omitted. Omitted accordingly it was on the slips of paper printed for school use.

" Lord, dismiss us with Thy blessing,
Thanks for mercies past receive ;
Pardon all their faults confessing ;
Time that's lost may all retrieve ;
May Thy children
Ne'er again Thy Spirit grieve."

The children, released from the dull strain of watching the clock, sang with spirit. Hester played on, inattentive to the words. At the end, without considering what she did, she pressed down the chords of the " Amen," and the singers joined in, all unaware of transgressing.

In the silence that followed she suddenly remembered her instructions to omit the word, and sat for a moment flushed and confused. But the deed was done. The children stood shuffling their feet, awaiting the signal of dismissal.

" You may go," she said. " We will do better to-morrow."

When their voices had died away down the road she closed the harmonium softly, and fell to walking to and fro, musing, tidying up the schoolroom by fits and starts. She wanted to sit down and have a good cry ; but always as the tears came near to flowing she fell to work afresh and checked them. Not until the

room looked neat again did she remember that she was hungry. Nuncey had cooked a pasty for her, and she fetched it from the cupboard, where it lay in a basket covered by a spotless white cloth. As she did so, her eyes fell on a damp spot on the floor where, after bandaging Mr. Sam, she had carefully washed out the stain of his blood.

She looked at her hands. They were clean; and yet, having set down the basket on the desk and turned her stool so that she might not see the spot on the floor, she continued to stare at them, and from them to the white cloth. A while she stood thus, irresolute, still listening to the bees zooming against the pane. Then with a sudden effort of will she walked out and across the yard, to the pump in the far corner.

She was stooping to raise the pump handle, but straightened herself up again at the sound—as it seemed to her—of a muffled sob.

She looked behind her and around. The playground was empty, the air across its gravelled surface quivering under the noonday heat. She listened.

Two long minutes passed before the sound was repeated; and this time she knew it for the sob of a child. It came from behind an angle of the building which hid a strip of the playground from view. She ran thither at once, and as she turned the corner her eyes fell on little Clem.

She had missed him from his place when the children returned to the schoolroom. His sister, she supposed, had taken him home.

He stood sentry now in the shade under the north wall of the building. He stood there so resolutely that, for the instant, Hester could scarcely believe the sobs had come from him. But he had heard her coming; and the face he turned to her, though tearless, was woefully twisted and twitching.

"My poor child!"

He stretched out both hands.

"Where is Myra? I want Myra, please!"

CHAPTER XV

MYRA IN DISGRACE

Myra was in her bedroom, under lock and key; and this is how it had happened.

"What put it into your head to make that speech?" asked Mrs. Purchase, as she and Mr. Sam wended their way back to Hall. In form the question was addressed to her nephew; in tone, to herself.

Mr. Sam paused as if for breath, and plucking down a wisp of honeysuckle from the hedgerow, sniffed at it to gain time.

"I don't like talking about such things," he answered; "but it came into my head to do my Master's bidding: 'Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you.'"

"Fiddlestick-end!" said Mrs. Purchase.

"I assure you"—

"If you don't mean to get upsides with Tom Trevarthen, I'm a Dutchman. 'Forgive your enemies,' may be gospel teaching, but I never knew a Rosewarne to practise it. You're a clever fellow, nephew

Sam, and that speech saved your face, as the Yankees say; but somehow I've a notion its cleverness didn't end there. I saw the schoolmistress watching you—did she put you up to it?"

"I don't mind telling you that she had interceded with me."

"I like the cut of that girl's jib," Mrs. Purchase announced after a pause. "She's good-looking, and she has pluck. But I don't take back what I said, that it's a wrong you're doing to Clem and Myra, putting them to school with all the riff-raff of the parish."

"That's the kind of objection one learns to expect from a Radical," her nephew answered drily.

"'Tis a queer thing, now," she mused, "that ever since I married 'Siah the family will have me to be a Radical; and 'tis the queerer, because ne'er one of 'ee knows what a Radical is or ought to be. S'pose I do hold that all mankind and all womankind has equal rights under the Lord—that don't mean they're all alike, do it? or that I can't tell a man from a woman, or my lord from a scavenger? D'ee reckon that we'm all-fellows-to-football aboard the *Virtuous Lady*, and the fo'c'sle hands mess aft?"

"They would if you were consistent," answered Mr. Sam, with positiveness.

She sighed impatiently. "There's times you make me long to wring your stiff neck. But I'll take

your own consistency, as you call it. I don't notice you send that precious boy o' yourn to the Board School; and yet if 'tis good enough for Clem and Myra, 'tis good enough for any Rosewarne."

"Calvin has received a superior education. Yet I don't mind telling you that, if I find Miss Marvin competent, I propose asking her to teach him privately."

"O—oh!" Mrs. Purchase pursed up her lips and eyed him askance. "Such a nice-looking girl, too!"

Mr. Sam flushed beneath his sallow skin. He was about to command her angrily to mind her own business, when the air between the hedgerows, and even the road beneath his feet, shook with a dull and distant detonation.

"Sakes alive!" cried Mrs. Purchase. "Don't tell me that's the powder-ship, up the river!"

"It didn't come up from the river—it came from Hall!" He gripped her arm with sudden excitement; then, as she began to protest, "Don't talk, woman, but help me along! It came from Hall, I tell you!"

Master Calvin defied Myra bravely enough while she threatened, and even while she piled a little heap of gunpowder under the sycamore and ostentatiously

sprinkled a train of it across the roadway. He supposed that she intended only to frighten him.

Nor would any mischief have happened had he kept his perch. The heap of gunpowder was too small to do serious damage—though he may well be excused for misdoubting this. But when Myra struck a match and challenged him for the last time, he called to her not to play the fool, and began to scramble down for dear life. In truth, for two or three minutes he had been feeling strangely giddy, and to make matters worse, was suddenly conscious of a horrible burning pain in his side.

So intolerable was the pain, that he clutched at it with one hand; and missing his hold with the other, slipped and hung dangling over the powder, supported only by the bough under the crook of his armpit. At that instant, while he struggled to recover his balance, Myra was horrified to see smoke curling about his jacket; a fiery shred of tobacco and jacket-lining dropped from his plucking fingers. She had flung away her match and was running forward—the burning stuff fell so slowly, there was almost time to catch it—when the ground at her feet leapt up with a flame and a bang, and Master Calvin thudded down upon the explosion.

She ran to him. He was not dead, for at once he began screaming at the pitch of his voice; but his

features were black, his smallclothes torn, and his legs writhed in a terrifying way. His screams sank to groans as she beat out the smouldering fire in his jacket-lining; and for a while she could get no other answer from him.

By and by she lost patience, and shook him by the shoulder.

"Oh, get up for goodness' sake! I believe you're more frightened than hurt; but if you're really hurt, sit up and tell me what's the matter."

"Let me alone," groaned Calvin. "I want to die."

"Fiddlesticks—'want to die'! Come along to the pump and wash yourself."

"You're a wicked girl! You tried to kill me!"

"I didn't. I wanted to frighten you, and—and I'm sorry; but you fired the powder yourself with your nasty pipe, and you've burnt a hole in your pocket. You'd best come along and get washed and changed before your father catches you. It looks to me you've lost one of your eyebrows, but the other one's so pale I daresay 'twon't be noticed. Or I might give you a pair with a piece of burnt cork."

It was while she stood considering this that Mr. Sam and her aunt made their appearance round the corner of the road.

"Whatever in the round world have you children

been doin' ?" panted Mrs. Purchase, and wound up with a gasp at sight of Calvin's face.

"I believe I'm going to die!" The boy began to writhe again.

"What has happened?" his father demanded, with a shake in the voice, stooping to lift him.

"She—she tried to kill me!" Calvin pointed at her with vindictive finger, and at once clasped both hands over his stomach.

"I did not," retorted Myra.

"Ask her who brought the powder and laid a train right under me! Ask her what she's doing with that box of matches!"

"Is that true?" Mr. Sam demanded again, straightening himself up and fixing a terrible stare on Myra.

The girl's face hardened. "Yes, I brought the powder." She pointed to the flask lying in the roadway.

"You dare to tell me that you did this deliberately?"

"I never did it at all."

"Yes, she did!" almost screamed the boy. "She put the powder here; she owns up to it."

Myra shrugged her shoulders and turned away. "Very well; he's telling a nasty fib, but you can believe him if you like."

"Stop a minute, miss." Mr. Sam strode across to her. "You don't get off in that fashion, I promise you!"

She looked up at him sidewise, under lowered brows. "Are you going to beat me?" she asked quietly.

The question took Mr. Sam aback. "You deserve a whipping if ever a girl did," he answered, after a second or two. "First, it seems, you almost succeed in killing your cousin, and then you tell a falsehood about it."

"I have told you the truth. I put the powder there. As for meaning to kill him, that's nonsense, and he knows it. I didn't even mean to hurt him, though he deserves it."

"Deserves it!" echoed Mr. Sam.

"Yes, for robbing Clem."

"Sam—Sam!" Mrs. Purchase thrust herself between them. "What's the matter? Don't go for to hurt the child!"

"What—what does she mean, then?" He had stretched out a hand to grip Myra by the shoulder, but fell back with a yellow face.

"Tom Trevarthen told me." Myra pointed from father to son. "He says you're no better than a pair of robbers."

"Myra," said her aunt quietly, "go to your room

at once. On your own confession you have done wickedly, and must be punished."

"Very well, Aunt Hannah."

"I must attend to Calvin first; but I will come to you by and by. Until then you are not to leave your room. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Aunt Hannah."

She turned and walked towards the house.

"And now," said Mrs. Purchase, after a glance at Mr. Sam's face, "let's see what bones are broken." She bent over Calvin, but looked up almost immediately, as Mr. Sam uttered a sharp exclamation.

"What's this?" he asked, stooping to pick up a briar pipe.

Master Calvin blinked, and turned his head aside from Mrs. Purchase's curious gaze.

"I think it belongs to Tom Trevarthen," he mumbled.

"How on the airth did Tom Trevarthen come to drop a pipe here, and walk off 'ithout troubling to pick it up? If 'twas a hairpin, now," said Mrs. Purchase, not very lucidly, "one could understand it."

"I—I'm going to be ill," wailed the wretched Calvin, with a spasmodic heave of the shoulders.

"Well," his aunt commented grimly after a moment, "you told the truth that time, anyway."

Having conveyed him to the house and put him, with Susannah's help, to bed, Aunt Hannah went off to Myra's room, but descended after a few minutes in search of Mr. Sam, whom she found pacing the garden walk.

"Well?" he asked.

"I've told her the punishment—bread and water, and to keep her room all day. She says nothing against it, and I think she's sorry about the powder; but I can get no sense into her until her mind's set at rest about Clem."

"What about him?"

"Why, the poor child's left behind at the school."

"Is that all? Miss Marvin will bring him home, no doubt."

"So I told her. But it seems she don't trust Miss Marvin—hates her, in fact."

"The child must be crazed."

"Couldn't you send Peter Benny?"

"Oh, certainly, if you wish it." Mr. Sam went indoors to the counting-house, where Mr. Benny jumped up from his desk in alarm at sight of the bandages.

"Mercy on us, sir—you have met with an accident?"

"A trifle. Are you busy just now?"

Mr. Benny blushed. "I might answer in your

words, sir—a trifle. Indeed, I hope, sir, you will not think it a liberty; but the late Mr. Rosewarne used very kindly to allow it when no business happened to be doing."

His employer stared at him blankly.

"On birthdays and such occasions," pursued Mr. Benny. "And by the way, sir, might I ask you to favour me with the date of your birthday? Your dear father's was the 18th of May." Mr. Sam's stare lost its blankness, and became one of sharp suspicion.

"What have you to do with my birthday, pray?"

"Nothing, sir—nothing, unless it pleases you. Some of our best and greatest men, sir, as I am well aware—the late Duke of Wellington, for instance—have had a distaste for poetry; not that my verses deserve any such name."

"Oh!" said Mr. Sam, his brow clearing, "you were talking of verses? I've no objection, so long as you don't ask me to read them." He paused, as Mr. Benny's face lengthened dejectedly. "I mean no reflection on yours, Benny."

"I thank you, sir."

"Shakespeare—and I am told you can't get better poetry than Shakespeare's—doesn't please me at all. I tried him once, on a friend's recommendation, and came on a passage which I don't hesitate to call lascivious. I told my friend so, and advised him to be

more careful in the reading he recommended. He was a minister of the gospel, too. I destroyed the book: one can't be too careful, with children about the house."

"I assure you, sir"—

"I don't suggest for a moment that you would be guilty of any such expressions as Shakespeare uses. We live in a different age. Still, poetry, as such, gives me no pleasure. I believe very firmly, Benny—as you may have gathered—in another world, and that we shall be held strictly to account there for all we do or say in this one."

"Yes, sir."

"If you will wait a moment, I have a note to write. You will deliver it, please, to Mrs. Trevarthen on your way home. But first I wish you to walk up to the school and fetch Master Clem."

Mr. Benny, absorbed in poetical composition, had either failed to hear the explosion at the gate, or had heard and paid no heed to it. He wondered why Master Clem should need to be fetched from school.

"And Miss Myra?" he suggested.

"Miss Myra has been sent to her room in disgrace," said Mr. Sam.

Mr. Benny asked no further questions, but pocketed the letter which Mr. Sam indited, and fetched his hat. As it happened, however, at the gate he met

Hester leading Clem by the hand; and receiving the child from her, handed him over to Susannah.

"You are going home?" he asked, as he rejoined Hester at the gate. They were already warm friends.

"I am on my way. And you?"

"We'll cross the ferry together, if you'll wait a moment while I deliver a note at Mrs. Trevarthen's."

Mrs. Trevarthen was at her door. She took the note, and, before opening it, looked at Hester curiously.

"You know what's inside of it, I reckon?" she said, turning to Mr. Benny.

"Not a word."

"My eyes are bad," said Mrs. Trevarthen, who, as a matter of fact, could not read.

Mr. Benny knew this, and knew also that Mrs. Trevarthen as a rule employed Aunt Butson to write her few letters and decipher the few that came to her.

"The light's bad for the time of year," he said. "Shall I read it for you, missus?"

"No; let *her* read it," answered the old woman, holding out the letter to Hester. Hester took it and read—

"MADAM,—This is to inform you that the rent of my cottage, at present occupied by you on a monthly tenancy at £9 per annum, will from the first of next

month be raised to £15; also that the tenancy will not, after that date, carry with it a permission to let lodgings.—Yours truly, S. ROSEWARNE."

In the silence that followed Mrs. Trevarthen fixed her bright beady eyes steadily on Hester. "You've driven forth my son from me," she said at length, "and you're driving forth my lodger, and there's nobbut the almshouse left. Never a day's worry has my son Tom given to me, and never a ha'porth o' harm have we done to you. A foreigner you are and a stranger; the lad made me promise not to curse 'ee, and I won't. But get out of my sight, and the Lord deliver us from temptation!—Amen."

Poor Mr. Benny, who had written half a dozen enthusiastic verses on the opening of the new school, crushed them down in his pocket. He had been so proud of them, too!

They ran—

"This morning the weather was wreathèd in smiles,
And we, correspondingly gay,
Assembled together from several miles
To welcome our Opening Day.

The children were plastic in body and mind,
Their faces and pinafores clean;
And persons scholastic, in accents refined,
With eloquence pointed the scene.

Blest scene! as its features we fondly recall,
O let us give thanks to the Lord!
The Parents, the Teacher, the Managers all,
Including the Clerk to the Board!"

BOOK III

CHAPTER XVI

AUNT BUTSON CLOSES SCHOOL

NEXT morning when Hester arrived at the school she found Mr. Sam waiting for her, with Myra, Clem, and a lanky, freckled youth of about sixteen, whom he introduced as Archelaus Libby. She could not help a smile at this odd name, and the young man himself seemed to be conscious of its absurdity. He blushed, held out his hand and withdrew it again, dropped his hat and caught it awkwardly between his knees. Myra (who had made the sign of the cross as Hester entered) stood and regarded him with a cold, contemptuous interest. Her uncle presented the poor fellow with a proprietary wave of the hand, as though he had been a dumb animal recently purchased.

"I telegraphed to Liskeard on my own responsibility. The Managers may take me to task; but I felt it to be imperative that you should have a male teacher to support you, and at once. At all costs we must prevent a repetition of such scenes as yesterday's."

Doubtless he had done Hester a service, and she tried to express her thanks, but did not succeed very well. To begin with, her spirit being roused, she desired no help; and to judge by Mr. Archelaus Libby's looks, the help he could give promised to be ineffective. She did not say this, of course; and he gazed at her so wistfully that she reproached herself for thinking it.

Mr. Sam had no such scruples. "I telegraphed to Liskeard," he repeated. "There was no time for a personal interview." (He paused, with a deprecating wave of the hand, as who shall say, "And this is what they sent.") "If," he continued, "you find him unequal to maintaining discipline, we—ha—must take other steps. In other respects I find him satisfactory. He tells me he is of the Baptist persuasion, a believer in Total Immersion."

Hester saw Myra's mouth twitching. She herself broke into merry laughter.

"I hope it won't be necessary to go that length," she answered. "We will do our best, at any rate." She held out her hand again, and Archelaus Libby grasped it warmly.

On the whole, Archelaus Libby's best proved to be better than she had expected. The boys made a butt of him from the beginning, but could get no

real advantage over one who laughed with them at his own discomfitures. He belonged to those meek ones who (it is promised) shall inherit the earth; and indeed, as the possessor of a two-guinea microscope—bought, as he explained to Hester, with his first earnings—he believed himself to inherit it already. This microscope, and the wonders he showed them under it, earned no little respect from the children. Also he had, without being aware of it, an extraordinary gift of mental arithmetic, and would rattle out the quotients of long compound division sums at alarming speed and with a rapid clicking sound at the back of his throat, as though some preternatural machinery were at work there. But most of all he conquered by sheer love of his kind and of every living creature. The lad seemed to brim over with love: he never arrived at forgiving anyone, being incapable of believing that anyone meant to offend. From the first he yielded to Hester a canine devotion which was inconvenient because it rendered him dumb.

Within a week Hester felt sure of herself and of the school, and confided her joy to Mr. Benny, who always met her at the ferry and accompanied her home to tea; for she was now installed as a lodger with the Benny household, greatly to Nuncey's delight. After tea Mr. Benny always withdrew to a

little office overhanging the tideway; a wooden, felt-roofed shed in which he earned money from 6.30 to 8.30 p.m. by writing letters for seamen. In this interval the two girls walked or bathed, returning in time to put the children to bed and help Mrs. Benny with the supper. They talked much, but seldom about the school—all the cares of which Hester left behind her at the ferry crossing.

"And that's what I like about you," Nuncey confided. "You don't give yourself airs like other schoolmistresses."

"How many others do you know?" asked Hester.

"None; but I know what I'm talkin' about. You know more about poetry and such-like than Dad; I daresay you know as much as Uncle Josh; and yet no one would think it, to look at you."

"Thank you." Hester dropped her a curtsey. "And who is Uncle Josh?"

"He's Dad's brother, and well known in London. I believe he writes for the papers; 'connected with the press'—that's how Dad puts it. When Dad writes a poem he hasn't time to polish it; so he sends it up to Uncle Josh, and it comes back beautifully polished by return of post. Now do you know what I want?" asked Nuncey, falling back and eyeing her.

"What?"

"Guess."

"Really I can't." Hester knew by this time that Nuncey's thoughts moved without apparent connection.

"I want to see you out of mourning—well, in half-mourning, then. It ought to be pale grey, and there's a lilac ribbon in Bonaday's shop at this moment. You needn't pretend you don't care about these things, for I know better."

After supper, and on their way to and from the ferry, Mr. Benny would talk readily enough about the school. But on one point—the tribulation it was bringing upon Aunt Butson—he kept silence; for the thought of it made him unhappy. He knew that Hester was innocent, but he could not wholly acquit himself of complicity in the poor old woman's fate. Mr. Benny had a troublesome and tender conscience in all matters that concerned his duty towards his neighbour. The School Board was driving Mrs. Butson out of employ, taking away her scanty earnings; and he was Clerk to the School Board. To be sure, if he resigned to-morrow, another man would take his place, and Mrs. Butson be not one penny the better. Mr. Benny saw this, yet it did not ease his conscience wholly.

Hester, too, kept silence. Her way to the school led her past the little shanty (originally a carpenter's

workshop) in which Aunt Butson taught. It stood a stone's-throw back from the village street, partly concealed by a clump of elms; but once or twice she had heard and spied children at play between the trees there—children with faces unfamiliar to her—and gathered that the old woman still kept her door open. As the days went by the date for raising Mrs. Trevarthen's rent, and the cottage still showed every sign of habitation, she took it for granted that Mr. Sam had relented—possibly in obedience to his promise not to persecute the young sailor. She did not know that, in serving his notice without consulting Peter Benny, Mr. Sam had made a trifling mistake; that Mrs. Trevarthen held her cottage on a quarterly tenancy, and could neither have her rent raised nor be evicted before Michaelmas. Hester would have been puzzled to say precisely what sealed her lips from inquiry. Partly, no doubt, she shrank from discovering a fresh obligation to Mr. Sam, whose unctuous handshake she was learning to detest. Tom Trevarthen had disappeared. His mother kept house unmolested. Why not let sleeping dogs lie? For the rest, the school absorbed most of her thoughts, and paid back interest in cheerfulness. The children were beginning to show signs of loyalty, and a teacher who has won loyalty has won everything. Myra alone stood aloof, sullen, impervious to kindness.

In truth, Myra was suffering. For the first time in their lives her will and Clem's had come into conflict; and Clem's revealed itself as unexpectedly, almost hopelessly, stubborn. That the *Virtuous Lady* had sailed for Quebec, carrying away Aunt Hannah, the one other person in the world who understood her, made little difference. A hundred Aunt Hannahs could not console her for this loss—for a loss she called it. "The woman is taking him from me!" She cried the words aloud to herself on her lonely walks, making the cattle in the fields, the horses in the stable, the small greyhound, even the fields and trees, confidants in her woe. "She is stealing you from me," she reproached Clem; "and you can't see that she is a witch! You don't love me any longer!" "I love you better than ever," protested poor Clem. "No, you don't, or you would choose between us. Say 'I hate her!'" But Clem shook his head. "I don't hate her; and besides, she isn't a witch."

She had been forbidden to speak to Calvin for a week. "My dear man," she answered Mr. Sam, to his no small astonishment, "do you think *I* want to talk to the pimply creature? He tells fibs; and besides, he's a robber."

"You are a wicked child; and if you persist in this talk, I shall have to punish you."

"Are you going to beat me? Beat away. But it's true."

He did not beat her; but one day, meeting Hester on the hill as she walked to school, he went so far as to suggest that Myra's spirit needed taming. She had been allowed to run loose, and her behaviour at home caused him many searchings of heart. He made no doubt that her behaviour in school was scarcely more satisfactory.

Hester admitted that he surmised correctly.

He had never been blessed with a daughter of his own, and hardly knew what to do with an unruly girl. Might he leave the matter in Miss Marvin's hands?

"If," said Hester, "you are speaking of her behaviour in school, you certainly may. She is jealous, poor child, because her brother has taken a fancy to be fond of me. In her place I should be furious. But I think we are going to be friends."

"Some form of punishment—if I might suggest"—

"I don't know of any that meets the case," Hester answered gravely.

"I have often"—he fastened on her that gaze of his which she most of all disliked—"I have oftentimes, of late especially, felt even Calvin to be a responsibility, without a mother's care." He went on

from this to the suggestion he had hinted to Mrs. Purchase. Would Miss Marvin be prepared (for an honorarium) to give his son private lessons? Could she afford the time? "I shrink from exposing him to influences, so often malign, of a boarding-school. What I should most of all desire for him is a steady, sympathetic home influence, a—may I say it?—a motherly influence."

Hester at this moment, averting her eyes, was aware of an old woman a few yards away, coming up the road, a woman erect as a soldier, with strong, almost mannish features, and eyes that glared at her fiercely from under a washed-out blue sunbonnet. Mr. Sam gave her good-morning as she went by, but she neither answered nor seemed to hear him.

"Who is she?" Hester had almost asked, when the woman turned aside into a path leading to the shed among the elms.

"She'll have to shut up shop next week," said Mr. Sam, following Hester's gaze. "I declare, Miss Marvin, one would think the old woman had ill-wished you, by the way you are staring after her. Don't believe in witchcraft, I hope?"

"I have never seen her till now, and I do feel sorry for her."

"She's not fit to teach, and never was."

"She's setting me a lesson in punctuality, at any

rate," said Hester, forcing a little laugh, glad of an excuse to end the conversation. But along the road and at intervals during the first and second lesson-hours the face of Mrs. Butson haunted her.

In the hour before dinner, while she sat among the little ones correcting their copy-books, the door-latch clicked, and she looked up with a start—to see the woman herself standing upon the threshold. Archelaus Libby, who had been chalking on the blackboard at lightning speed a line of figures for his mental arithmetic class, turned to announce them, and paused with a click in his throat which seemed to answer that of the latch. In the sudden hush Hester felt her cheek paling. Somehow she missed the courage with which she had met Tom Trevarthen.

"Good-morning!" said Mrs. Butson harshly. "'Tisn't forbidden to come in, I hope?"

"Good-morning," Hester found voice to answer. "You may come in, and welcome, if you wish us well."

"I'm Sarah Butson. As for wishing well or ill to 'ee, we'll leave that alone. I've come to listen, not to interrup'." She advanced into the room and pointed a finger at Archelaus Libby. "Is that your male teacher? He bain't much to look at, but I'm told he's terrible for sums."

"You shall judge for yourself. Go on with your

lesson, Archelaus; and you, Mrs. Butson, take a seat if you will."

"No; I'll stand." Mrs. Butson shut her jaws firmly and treated the small scholars around her to a fierce, unwavering stare. Many winced, remembering her mercies of old. "Go on, young man," she commanded Archelaus.

He plunged into figures again, nervously at first. Soon he recovered his volubility, and, calling on one of the elder boys to name two rows of figures for division, wrote them out and dashed down the quotient; then flung in the working at top speed, showing how the quotient was obtained; next rubbed out all but the original divisor and dividend, and, swinging round upon the boys, raced them through the sum, his throat clicking as he appealed from one boy to another, urging them to answer faster and faster yet. "Yes, yes—but try to multiply in double figures—twice sixteen, thirty-two: it's no harder than four times eight—the tables don't really stop at twelve-times. Now then—seventy-eight into three-twenty-six? You—you—you—what's that, Sunny Pascoe? Four times? Right—how many over? Fourteen. Now then, bring down the next figure, and that makes the new dividend."

Mrs. Butson passed her hand over Hester's desk. "You keep 'em well dusted," she observed, turning

her back upon Archelaus and his calculations. Her angry-looking eyes travelled over desks, floor, walls, and the maps upon the walls, then back to the children.

"How many?" she asked.

"We have sixty-eight on the books."

"How many here to-day?"

"Sixty-six. There are two absent, with certificates. Would you like me to call the roll?"

"No. You've got 'em in hand, too, I see." She picked up a copy-book from the desk before her, examined it for a moment, and laid it down. "You like this work?" she asked, turning her eyes suddenly upon Hester.

"How else could one do it at all?"

"I hate it—yes, hate it," the old woman went on. "Though 'twas my living, I've hated it always. Yet I taught 'em well—you cross the ferry and ask Schoolmaster Penrose if I did not. I taught 'em well; but you beat me—fair and square you do. Only there'll come a time—I warn you—when the hope and pride'll die out of you, and you'll wake an' wonder how to live out the day. I don't know much, but I know that time must come to all teachers. They never can tell when 'tis coming. After some holiday, belike, it catches 'em sudden. The new lot of children be no worse than the last, but they get

treated worse because the teacher's come to end of tether. You take my advice and marry before that time comes."

"I don't think I shall ever marry."

"Oh yes, you will!" Aunt Butson's eyes seemed to burn into Hester's. "You're driving me out to work in the fields; but, marry or not, you'll give me all the revenge I look for." The old woman hunched her shoulders and made abruptly for the door. As it slammed behind her a weight seemed to fall upon Hester's heart and a sudden shadow across her day.

Down in the little cottage Aunt Butson found Mrs. Trevarthen standing beside a half-filled packing-case, and contemplating a pair of enormous china spaniels which adorned the chimney-piece, one on either side of Chinese junk crusted with sea-shells.

"What's to be done with 'em?" Mrs. Trevarthen asked. "They'll take up more room than they're worth, and I doubt they'll fetch next to nothing if I leave 'em behind for the sale. My old man got 'em off a pedlar fellow for two-and-threepence apiece, back-along when we first set up house. A terrible extravagance, as I told 'en at the time; but he took such a fancy to the things, I never had the heart to say what I thought about their looks."

"You can leave 'em bide," answered Aunt Butson.

"Unpack that there case agen an' turn it over to me. I'm goin' to quit."

"There's too much red-tape about the Widows' Houses," Mrs. Trevarthen pursued. "The Matron says, if I want to bring Tom's parrot, I must speak to Sir George an' get leave: 'tis agen the rules, seemingly."

"Be quiet with your parrot, an' listen to me! I'm goin' to shut up school, an' quit. Go an' make your peace wi' that Judas Rosewarne: tell 'en you're gettin' the rids of me, an' he'll let you down easy enough."

Mrs. Trevarthen for a moment did not seem to hear, but stood meditatively fingering the china ornaments. Suddenly she swung round upon her lodger.

"You're goin' to give in? After all your talk, you're goin' to let that slave-driver ride roughshod over you?"

"My dear"—Aunt Butson hunched her shoulders—"'tis no manner of good. Who's goin' to pay me tuppence a week, when that smooth-featured girl up the hill teaches ten times better for a penny? I've been up there to see, and I ben't a fool. She teaches ten times better than ever I did in my life. How many children do 'ee think turned up this mornin'? Five? And I've taught five-an'-thirty at

one time. I sent 'em away; told 'em to come again to-morrow, and take word to their fathers and mothers to step around at twelve o'clock. They'll think 'tis to come to an arrangement about the fees; but what I have to tell is that the school's wound up."

"You may do as it pleases you, Sally Butson. You may go, if you choose, and ask Rosewarne to put his foot on your neck. But if you think I make any terms with 'en, you're mistaken. He've a-driven my Tom from home an' employ; he've a-cast a good son out o' my sight and knowledge, and fo'ced 'en, for all I know, into wicked courses—for Tom's like his father before 'en; you can lead 'en by a thread, but against ill-usage he'll turn mad. Will I forgive Rosewarne for this? He may put out the fire in my grate and fling my bed into the street, and I'll laugh and call it a little thing; but for what he've a-done to the son of a widow I'll put on him the curse of a widow, and not all his wrath shall buy it off by an ounce or shorten it by one inch."

Mrs. Trevarthen — ordinarily a mild-tempered woman—shook with her passion as an aspen shakes and whitens in the wind. Aunt Butson laid a hand on her shoulder.

"There—there! Put on the kettle, my dear, and let's have a drink of tea. It takes a woman different when she've a-got children. But it don't follow, be-

cause I'm a single woman, I can't read a lad's fortune. You mark my words, Tom'll fall on his feet."

Early next morning Mrs. Butson left the cottage with a small pile of books, disinterred from the depths of the box which contained all her belongings —cheap books in gaudy covers of red, blue, and green cloth, lavishly gilded without, execrably printed within: *The Wide, Wide World; Caspar; Poor John, or Nature's Gentleman; The Parents' Assistant.* Her system of education recognised merit, but rewarded it sparingly. As a rule, she had distributed three prizes per annum, before the Christmas holidays, and at a total cost of two shillings and sixpence. To-day she spread out no fewer than ten upon her desk, covering them out of sight with a duster before her scholars arrived.

A few minutes before nine she heard them at play outside among the elms, and at nine o'clock punctually called them in to work by ringing her hand-bell —the clapper of which (vain extravagance!) had recently been shortened by the village tinsmith to prevent its wearing the metal unequally. Five scholars answered its summons—'Thaniel Langmaid, Maudie Hosken, Ivy Nancarrow, Jane Ann Toy and her four-year-old brother Luke. Their fathers, one and all, though dwelling in the village, were employed in

trades on the other side of the ferry, and therefore could risk offending Mr. Rosewarne; but their independence had not yet translated itself into steady payment of the fees, and Mr. Toy (for example) notoriously practised dilatoriness of payment as part of his scheme of life.

Without a twitch of her fierce features she ranged up her attenuated class, distributed the well-thumbed books—with a horn-book for little Luke Toy—and for two hours taught them with the same joyless severity under which their fathers and mothers had suffered. For spelling "lamb" without the final b, Ivy Nancarrow underwent the punishment invariably meted out for such errors—mounted the dunce's bench, and wore the dunce's cap; nor did 'Thaniel Langmaid's knuckles escape the ruler when he dropped a blot upon his copy, "Comparisons are Odious"—a proposition of which he understood the meaning not at all. The cane and the birch-rod on Mrs. Butson's desk served her now but as insignia. She had not wielded them as weapons of justice since the day (four years ago) when a struggle with Ivy Nancarrow's elder brother had taught her that her natural strength was abating.

At twelve o'clock she told the children to close their books, dismissed them to play, and sat down to await the invited company.

Mr. Toy was the first to arrive. He came straight from the jetties—that is to say, as straight as a stevedore can be expected to come at noon on Saturday, after receiving his week's pay. He wore his accustomed mask of clay-dust, and smelt powerfully of beer, two pints of which he had consumed in an unsocial hurry at the Ferry Inn on his way.

"Good-morning." Mrs. Butson welcomed him with a nod. "Your wife is coming, I hope?"

"You bet she is," Mr. Toy answered cheerfully, smacking the coins in his trousers pocket. "She don't miss looking me up this day of the week." Recollecting that certain of the shillings he so lightly jingled were due to Mrs. Butson, he suddenly grew confused, and his embarrassment was not lightened by the entrance of Maudie Hosken's parents. Mr. Hosken tilled a small freehold garden in his spare hours, and Mr. Toy owed him four shillings and sixpence for potatoes, and had reason to believe that Mrs. Hosken took a stern view of the debt.

Next came Mrs. Langmaid, a seaman's widow, and lastly Mrs. Toy, who noted that all the others had made themselves tidy for the ceremony, and at once began to apologise for her husband's appearance.

Aunt Butson cut her short, however, by ringing the schoolbell, and marshalling her five pupils back to their seats. The parents dropped themselves here

and there among the many empty benches in the rear, and the schoolmistress, after rapping the desk with her cane, from force of habit, mounted the platform, uncovered the row of books, and began to arrange them with hands that trembled a little.

"Friends and neighbours, the reason I've called 'ee together is for a prize-giving. I'll have to say a word or two when that's done; but just now a prize-giving it is, and we'd best get to business. Girls: Maudie Hosken, first prize for good conduct; Ivy Nancarrow, consolation prize, ditto; Jane Ann Toy, extra consolation prize, ditto. Step up, girls, and take your books."

Until Mrs. Hosken leaned forward and nudged her daughter in the back, the children did not budge, so bewildered were they by these sudden awards. When Maudie, however, picked up courage, the other two bravely bore her company, and each received a book.

"Boys: 'Thaniel Langmaid, first prize for good conduct; Luke Toy, consolation prize for ditto."

"Seemin' to me," remarked Mr. Toy audibly, nudging his wife, "there's a deal o' consolation for our small family."

"Hush!" answered his wife. "There's as much gilt 'pon Lukey's book as 'pon any; an' 'tis almost as big."

"Girls: English prize, Ivy Nancarrow—and I hope that in futur', whoever teaches her, she won't think L-A-M spells 'lamb.' Sums and geography prize, Maudie Hosken; junior prize, Jane Ann Toy."

"Boys: General knowledge, 'Thaniel Langmaid; general improvement, Luke Toy."

"That makes four altogether." Mr. Toy jingled his shillings furtively. "Look here, Selina," he whispered, "we'll have to pay the old 'ooman something on account. How else to get out o' this, I don't see."

"An' now, friends an' neighbours," began Aunt Butson resolutely, "I've a-fetched 'ee together to say that 'tis all over; the school's come to an end. You've stuck by me while you could, and I thank you kindly. But 'tis hard for one of my age to fight with tyrants, and tyrants and Government together be too much for me. I've a-taught this here village for getting-up three generations. Lord knows I never loved the work; but Lord knows I was willing to go on with it till He called me home. Take a look at thicky there blackboard an' easel, bought but the other week; and here's a globe now, cost me fifteen shillin'—an' what'll I do with it?" She detached it from its frame, and before passing it round for inspection, held it between her trembling palms. "Here be all the nations o' the earth, civilised and

uncivilised; and here be I, Sarah Butson, with no place upon it, after next Monday, to lay my head."

She looked up with fierce, tearless eyes, and looking up, caught sight of Mr. Samuel Rosewarne in the doorway.

"Oh, good-morning, Mrs. Butson!" nodded Mr. Sam easily. "I looked in to see if you'd collected your school-fees this week, as the law requires. You are doing so, it seems?"

"Rosewarne"— Mrs. Butson stepped down from her platform, globe in hand.

"Eh? I beg your pardon?" But before the mischief in her eyes he turned and fled.

She followed him to the door.

"Take *that*, you thievin' Pharisee!"

The globe missed his head by a few inches, and went flying down the roadway toward the ferry. Aunt Butson strode back among her astonished audience.

"That's my last word to *he*," she said, panting; "and here's my last to you." She picked up her chalk, advanced to the blackboard, and wrote rapidly in bold, clear hand—

BLAST ALL EDUCATION!

"You may go, friends," said she. "I'd like to be alone, if you please."

CHAPTER XVII

PETER BENNY'S DISMISSAL

Although Master Calvin Rosewarne, by telling tales, first set the persecution going against Nicky Vro, he did so without any special malevolence. It was an instance of Satan's finding mischief for idle hands. The child, in fact, had no playmates, and little to do; and happening to pass Mrs. Trevarthen's cottage as her household stuff and sticks of furniture were being removed in a hand-cart, he followed downhill to the ferry to watch the transhipment.

Some minutes later, Mrs. Trevarthen, having locked her door for the last time, laid the key under a geranium-pot on the window-sill. There was no sentiment in her leave-taking. A few late blossoms showed on the jasmine which, from a cutting planted by her in the year of Tom's birth, had over-run and smothered the cottage to its very chimney. Her Michaelmas daisies and perennial phloxes—flowers of her anxious care—were in full bloom. But the old soul had no eyes for them, now at the last, being flustered by the importance of her journey and the

thought of many things, hastily packed, which might take harm in crossing the ferry. Mr. Toy (a neighbourly fellow with all his failings, and one of that not innumerous class of men who delight in any labour, so it be unprofitable) had undertaken to load the ferry-boat; but having in mere exuberance of good-nature imbibed more beer than was good for him, he could not be trusted with the chinaware.

Neighbours appeared at every doorway—the more emotional ones with red eyes—to wish Mrs. Trevarthen good-bye. She answered them tremulously; but her mind, all the way down the street, ran on a hamper of chinaware, the cover of which she could not remember to have tied. Her left arm rested in Aunt Butson's (who carried the parrot's cage swathed in an old petticoat); on her right she bore a covered basket.

At the slip Mr. Toy handed her on board. He himself would cross later in the horse-boat, with his hand-cart and the heavier luggage.

"Better count the parcels, missus," he advised. "There's fifteen, as I make out; and Mr. Vro 'll hand 'em out careful 'pon t'other side. You'd best wait there till I come across with the rest."

Instead of taking her seat at once, Mrs. Trevarthen stood for a moment bewildered amid the packages crowding the thwarts and the sternsheets; and most

unfortunately Old Vro selected this moment to thrust off from shore with his paddle. The impetus took her unawares, and she fell forward; her basket struck against the boat's gunwale, its cover flew open, and forth from it, half-demented with fright, sprang her tabby cat, Methuselah. The poor brute lit upon the parrot's cage, which happened to be balanced upon an unstable pile of cooking utensils at the end of Nicky Vro's thwart. Cat, cage and parrot, a gridiron, two cake tins, a bundle of skewers, and a cullender, went overboard in one rattling avalanche, and Master Calvin laughed aloud from the shore.

Nicky Vro, with a wild clutch, grabbed hold of the cage before it sank, and dragged it and the screaming bird out of danger. The gridiron and skewers went down at once—luckily in four feet of water, whence they could be recovered at low-ebb. The cullender sank slowly and with dignity. The cat headed straight for shore, and, defying all attempts of Mr. Toy and Aunt Butson to head him off, slipped between them and dashed up the hill on a bee-line for home. Master Calvin, seated astride the low wall above the slipway, almost rolled off his perch with laughter. Uncle Vro, cage in hand, turned on him with sudden fury.

"Better fit you was at your lessons," he called back, shaking his fist, "than grinning there at your

father's dirty work! Toy, run an' pull the ears of 'en!—'twon't be noticed if you pull 'em an inch longer than they be."

The boy, as Mr. Toy ran towards him with a face that meant business, dropped off the wall on its far side, and charged up the hill for home in a terror scarcely less urgent than Methuselah's. Nor did he feel safe until, at the gate of Hall, he tumbled into his father's arms and panted out his story.

"Talked about my 'dirty work,' did he?" mused Mr. Sam, pulling at his under-lip. He wheeled about and walked straight to the counting-house, where Mr. Benny sat addressing Michaelmas bills.

"Put those aside for a moment," he commanded. "I want a letter written."

Mr. Benny took a sheet of notepaper from the rack, dipped his pen, and looked up attentively.

"It's for the ferryman below here—Old Vro, as you call him. Write that after Saturday next his services will not be required."

Mr. Benny laid down his pen slowly and stared at his master.

"I beg your pardon, sir—you can't mean that you're dismissing him?"

"Why not?"

"What, old Nicky Vro?" Mr. Benny shook his

head, as much as to say that the thing could not be done.

"He has been grossly impudent. Apart from that, his incompetence is a scandal, and I have wondered more than once how my father put up with it. In justice to the public using the ferry, and to Lady Killiow as owner of the ferry rights— But, excuse me, I prefer not to argue the matter. He must go. Will you, please, write the letter, and deliver it when you cross the ferry at dinner-time."

"But, indeed, Mr. Samuel—you must forgive me, sir—old Nicky may be cantankerous at times, but he means no harm to any living soul. The passengers make allowances: he's a part of the ferry, as you might say. As for impudence—if he really has been impudent—will you let me talk to him, sir? I'll engage he asks pardon and promises not to offend again. But think, before in your anger you turn him adrift—where can the old man go, but to the workhouse? What can he have saved, on twelve shillings a week? For every twelve shillings he's earned Lady Killiow three to five pounds, week by week, these forty years; and not one penny of it, I'll undertake to say, has he kept back from her ladyship. What wage is it, after all, for the years of a man's strength that now, with a few more years to live, he should lose it?"

"Have you done?"

Mr. Benny stood up. "I should never have done, sir, until you listened to me."

"You refuse to write the letter?"

"I humbly beg you, sir, not to ask me to write it."

"But I do ask you to write it."

Mr. Benny thrust both hands nervously beneath his coat-tails, walked to the window and stood for a second or two, staring out upon the garden. His cheeks were flushed. He had arrived at one of those moments in life which prove a man; but of heroism he was not conscious at all.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Samuel," said he, turning again to the table. "If your father had told me to write such a letter, I should have used an old servant's liberty and warned him that he was acting unjustly. Though it made him angry, he would have understood. But I see, sir, that I have no right to argue with you; and so let us have no more words. I cannot write what you wish."

"My father," answered Mr. Sam, wagging a finger at him, "tolerated many things I do not propose to tolerate. He suffered this old dotard to annoy the public, though long past work. I am not surprised to learn that he suffered you to forget your place."

Mr. Benny gathered up his papers without answering.

"Look here, Benny," Mr. Sam resumed, after watching him for a while, "I don't wish to be hard on you; I only require obedience. It's a bit foolish of you—eh?—to be quarrelling with your bread and butter."

"May be, sir."

"If you leave me, I wish it to be understood that 'tis by your own choice."

The little man met his master's eyes now with a look of something like contempt. "If that salves your conscience, sir, by all means have it so. But if 'tis to be plain truth between us, you want a younger clerk."

"Did I ever complain of your incompetence?"

"My incompetence, sir? 'Tis my competence you surely mean? I reckon no man can be sure of being a good servant till he has learnt to advise for his master's good against his master's will."

"What's the matter with 'ee, Peter?" asked Nicky Vro as he rowed Mr. Benny across the ferry at dinner-time. "You're looking as downcast as a gib cat."

"I was wondering," answered Mr. Benny gently, "how many times we two have crossed this ferry together."

Nicky Vro pondered. "Now that's the sort o'

question I leave alone o' set purpose, and I'll tell 'ee for why. One night, years ago, and just as we was off to bed, my poor wife says to me, 'I wonder how many times you've crossed the ferry, first and last.' 'Hundreds and thousands,' I says, just like *so*. She'd a-put the question in idleness, an' in idleness I answered it. Will you believe it?—between twelve and one in the morning I woke up with my head full o' figgers. Not another wink o' sleep could I get, neither. Soon as ever I shook up the bolster an' settled down for another try, I seed myself whiskin' back and forth over this here piece o' water like a piston-rod in a steamship, and off I started countin' for dear life. Count? I tell you it lasted for nights, and by the end o' the week I had to see the doctor about it. I was losin' flesh. Doctor, he gave me a bottle o' trade—very flat-tasted stuff it was, price half a crown, with a sediment if you let it stand; and after a few days the trouble wore off. They tell me there's a new pupil teacher up to the school can answer questions like that while you're countin' his buttons. I've seen the fellow: a pigeon-chested poor creatur', with his calves put on the wrong way. I'd a mind to tell 'en that with figgers, as with other walks o' life, a man's first business is to look after his own. But I didn't like to, he looked so harmless. Puttin' one thing with another, Peter Benny, I'd advise you

to leave these speckilations alone. Be it a thousand times or ten thousand, there's only one time that counts—the last; and only the Lord A'mighty knows when that'll be."

Mr. Benny sighed. "When the Lord sets a man free of his labour, Nicky, He does it gently. But we have to deal with an earthly master, we two, and his mercies aren't so gentle."

Nicky Vro nodded. "You'm thinkin' of they two poor souls up the hill. A proper tyrant Mister Sam can be, and so I told that ugly-featured boy of his, when I put Mrs. Trevarthen across this mornin'. 'Twas a shame, too, to lose my temper with the cheeld; for a cat couldn' help laughin'—supposin' he wasn't the partickler cat consarned." The old man told the story, chuckling wheezily.

"You went too far, Nicky. I have the best reasons for knowing that you went too far. Now listen to me. As soon as you get back, hitch up your boat, walk straight up to Hall, and tell Mr. Sam that you're sorry."

"Well, so I am in a way, though the fellow do turn my stomach. Still there wasn' no sense in rappin' out on the boy."

"It doesn't help the old woman, you know," said Mr. Benny, and sighed again, bethinking himself how vain had been his own protest.

"Not a bit," assented Mr. Vro cheerfully. "Well, I'll go back and make it up with the varmint. I reckon he means to give me a bad few minutes; but 'tis foolish to quarrel when folks can't do without one another, and so I'll tell 'en."

Half an hour ago Mr. Benny had been a brave man, but as he neared his home a sudden cowardice seized him. It was not that he shirked breaking the news to his wife; nay, he fiercely desired to tell her, and get the worst over. But in imagination he saw the children seated around the table, all hungry as hunters for the meal which, under God's grace, he had never yet failed to earn; and the thought that they might soon hunger and not be fed, for a moment unmanned him. He hurried past the ope leading to his door. The dinner-hour's quiet rested on the little town, and there was no one in the street to observe him as he halted by the church gate, half-minded to return. The gate stood open, and as he glanced up at the tower the clock there rang out its familiar chime. He passed up the path, entered, and cast himself on his knees.

For half an hour he knelt, and, although he prayed but by fits and starts, by degrees peace grew within him and possessed his soul. He waited until the clock struck two—by which time the children would

be back at school—and walked resolutely homeward.

Mrs. Benny and Nuncey were alone in the kitchen, where the board had been cleared of all but the tablecloth and his own knife and fork. They cried out together upon his dilatoriness; but while his wife turned to fetch his dinner from the oven, Nuncey took a step forward, scanning his face.

"Father?"

He put out a hand as he dropped into his seat, and stared along the empty table.

"I am dismissed."

Mrs. Benny faced about, felt for a chair, and sat down trembling. Nuncey took her father's hand.

"Tell us all about it," she commanded; and he told them.

His wife cast her apron over her head.

"But he'll take you back," she moaned. "If you go to 'en and ask 'en properly, he'll surely take you back!"

"Don't be foolish, mother." Nuncey laid a hand on her father's shoulder, and he looked up at her with brimming eyes. "'Tis Rosewarne that shall send to us before we go to him!"

She patted the tired shoulders, now bent again over the table.

"But what a brave little father it is, after all!"

CHAPTER XVIII

RIGHT OF FERRY

"WHAT's the matter with Benny?" asked Nicky Vro as he rowed Hester across that evening. They were alone in the boat. "The man seemed queer in his manner this morning, like as if he was sickenin' for something, and this afternoon I han't seen fur nor feather of 'en." He dug away with his paddles, and resumed with a chuckle, after a dozen strokes, "The man hasn't been quarrellin' with his bread an' butter, I hope? I went up to see Mr. Sam on a little business o' my own after dinner, and he fairly snapped my nose off—called me an impident old fool, and gave me the sack. Iss fay, he did! I wasn't goin' to argue with the man. 'You'll think better o' this to-morrow,' I said, and with that I comed away. Something must have occurred to put 'en out before he talked that nonsense to *me*."

Next morning, Hester—who meanwhile had learned the truth—found the old fellow in the same cheerful, incredulous frame of mind. She might have told him how serious was his case; but it is improbable that she could have convinced him, and, moreover, Mr. Benny, before confiding to her the reason

of his own dismissal, had made her promise to keep it a secret.

By Saturday, however, it was generally known that Mr. Sam had found some excuse or other to get rid of his father's confidential clerk. Now Mr. Benny had hitherto brought down Nicky's weekly wages on Saturday evenings as he crossed by the ferry. This week no Mr. Benny appeared, nor any messenger from Hall; and consequently on Sunday morning early Nicky donned a clean shirt-front and marched up to the house to claim his due.

"I make it a rule," said Mr. Sam, "to dispense no moneys on the Sabbath."

"The ferry charges double on the Sabbath, as you call it," answered Nicky, "and always has. I don't see where your squeamishness begins. Hows'ever, I'll call to-morrow rather than hurt any man's conscience; only let's have it clear when the money's to be paid in futur'."

"In future?" echoed Mr. Sam. "I hoped I had made it clear that after this week you cease to be ferryman."

"That's a good joke, now," said Nicky.

"I am glad you take it so pleasantly. Come to me to-morrow, and you shall be paid; and again next Saturday, after you have chained up for the night. That, I warn you, will be the last time."

"Oh, you'll think better of it by Saturday!"

That Mr. Sam did not think better of it scarcely needs to be said; and during the next few days some of Nicky's confidence began to ooze away. His master made no sign; he could not hear that anyone had been engaged in his place, or that anyone had been proposed for the job, but this silence somehow disconcerted rather than reassured him. He discussed it with his neighbour Hosken (one of the few small freeholders in the parish, who along with a cottage and two acres of garden had inherited a deep ancestral suspicion of the Rosewarnes and all their ways), and between them the pair devised a plan to meet contingencies.

The ferry closed at eight p.m. during the winter months. At half-past eight next Saturday night Nicky again presented himself at Hall, and was politely received in the counting-house.

"Take a seat," suggested Mr. Sam.

"Thank 'ee, sir," said Nicky, somewhat reassured. This opening promised at least that Mr. Sam found the situation worth discussing. "Thank 'ee, sir; but 'tis a relief to me to stand, not to mention the trousers."

"Please yourself." Mr. Sam paused, and appeared to be waiting.

"'Tis nice seasonable weather for the time of

year," said Nicky cheerfully, producing a large canvas bag and reaching forward to lay it on the writing-table. It contained his week's takings, mostly in coppers. "Three pounds, twelve shillings, and ninepence, sir, if you'll count it. There's one French penny, must have been put upon me just now after dark. I can't swear to the person, though I can guess. The last load but one, I brought across a sailor-looking chap, a bustious, big fellow, with a round hat like a missionary's, and all the rest of him in sea-cloth. Thinks I, 'You've broken ship, my friend.' The man had a drinking face, and altogether I didn't like his looks. So, next trip, I warned the constable across the water, in case he heard of a seaman missing from the west'ard. But this here French penny I only discovered just now, when I counted up the day's takings."

"I fancy you must be mistaken," said Mr. Sam. "The man has a good character for honesty."

"What? You know 'en?"

"He is the new tenant of Mrs. Trevarthen's cottage, and has come to take over the ferry." In the pause that followed, Mr. Sam counted and arranged the coins in small stacks. "Three-twelve-nine, did you say? Right. But excuse me, there's one thing you've forgotten."

Nicky understood. Very slowly he drew a chain

from his left trouser pocket, detached two keys, and laid them on the table. His face worked, and for the moment he seemed on the verge of an outburst; but, when he spoke, it was with dignity, albeit his voice trembled.

"Mr. Samuel, you try to go where the devil can't, between the oak and the rind. Your father fought with men of his own size, and gave an' took what the fightin' brought; but as for you, you fight with women and children, and old worn-out men, such as the Lord helps because they can't help themselves. You han't beat us yet—not by a long way. I warn you to pray that the way may be lengthened; for 'tis when you've overcome us, an' the Lord takes up our cause, that your troubles 'll begin."

Small sleep came to Nicky Vro that night. What troubled him most in the prospect of the struggle ahead—for a struggle he meant it to be—was his position as Rosewarne's tenant. Mean as was his hovel above the ferry—rented by him at four pounds a year—he clung to it, and Mr. Samuel would certainly turn him out. By good luck he paid his rent quarterly, and could not be evicted before Christmas. He had talked this over with his neighbour, Hosken, who had encouraged him to be cheerful. "Drat it all, uncle," said Hosken, himself the cheeriest of men, "if the

worst comes to the worst, I'll take you in myself, and give you your meals and a crib."

Nicky shook his head. "You'd best talk it over with your wife," said he, "afore you make free with your promises. She's a good woman, but afflicted with tidiness. I doubt my ways be too messy for her."

While he lay on his straw mattress thinking of these things, a distant gallop of hoofs woke the night, and by and by, with much clattering of loose stones, a horse came plunging down the village street.

Old Nicky, who slept in his clothes, was out of bed and ready before the rider drew rein.

"'Tis young Tregenza from Kit's Harbour," he muttered. "I heard that his missus was expectin'. Lord, how a man will ride for his first! All right! all right!" he sung out, fumbling with the bar as the butt of a riding-whip rattled on the shutter. "Be that you, Mr. Tregenza?"

"For the Lord's sake, uncle!" an agitated voice made answer out of the darkness.

"There, there! Yours ben't the first case that have happened, my lad, and you'll ride easier next time. Hitch up the horse, and I'll have the boat out in two two's."

"Why can't you fetch out the horse-boat?"

"Because, my son, I ben't the proper ferryman. You must ride back up the hill if you want *he;* and

even so, I doubt he'll have to knock up the folks at Hall to get at the keys."

Mr. Tregenza broke out into impatient swearing on all who delayed travel on the king's highway.

"You may leave your curses, young man, to them with a better right to use 'em. Thank the Almighty there's a boat to put you across. Hosken's blue boat it is; you'll find her ready to launch, down 'pon the slip. Take her and pull for the doctor. Tell 'en 'tis no use his bringing a horse, for there's no boat to fetch a horse over. But there's Tank's grey mare up to the inn. I'll have her ready saddled for him, if he'll promise to ride steady and mind the sore 'pon her near shoulder."

All the village had heard the midnight gallop of hoofs; all the village had guessed accurately who the rider was, and why he rode. But Nicky's dismissal was known to a few only. Soon after daybreak the news of this spread too, with the circumstance that only Nicky's good-nature had kept clear the king's highway for a message which above all others needs to be carried with speed.

Nicky sat complacent off the ferry-slip in Hosken's blue boat when the new ferryman arrived (twenty minutes late, by reason of his having to fetch the keys from Hall), and stolidly undid the padlock fastening the official craft.

"Aw, good-mornin'!" Nicky hailed him.

"Mornin'," said the new ferryman.

"We're in opposition, it seems."

"Darned if I care." The new ferryman lit his pipe and spat. "My name's Elijah Bobe."

"Then, Elijah Bobe, you may as well go home. 'Tis Sunday, and a slack day; but, were it Saturday and full business, your takings wouldn't cover your keep."

"Darned if I care," Mr. Bobe repeated. "I'm paid by the week." He sucked at his pipe for a while. "Ticklish job, ain't it?—interferin' with a private ferry?" he asked.

But Nicky had taken opinion upon this. So far as he could discover, the case lay thus: Of the ferry itself nothing belonged to Lady Killiow but the slipway on the near shore. The farther slipway was not precisely no-man's-land, for the foreshore belonged to the Duchy, and the soil immediately above it to Sir George Dinham; but here half a dozen separate interests came into conflict. Sir George, while asserting ownership of the land, would do nothing to repair or maintain the slip on it, arguing very reasonably that he derived no profit from the dues, and that since these went to Lady Killiow, she was bound to maintain her own landing-places. Rosewarne, on the other hand, as Lady Killiow's steward, flatly refused to

execute repairs upon another person's property. The Duchy, being appealed to, told the two parties (in effect) to fight it out. The Highway Board was ready enough to maintain the road down to highwater mark, but, on legal advice, declined to go farther. The Harbour Commissioners held that to repair a private ferry was no business of theirs, and, although the condition of the slipway had for years been a scandal, refused to meddle. The whole dispute raised the nice legal points, What is a ferry? Does the term include not only the boat but access to the boat? And, incidentally, if anyone broke a leg on the town shore on his way between highwater mark and the boat, from whom could he recover damages?

In short, Nicky felt easy enough about landing and embarking his passengers on the town shore. Rosewarne could not challenge him without raising the whole question of the slipway. But on the near shore he must act circumspectly. To be sure the approach to the water here was part of the king's highway. The whole village used it, and moored their boats without let or hindrance off the slip which (since the land belonged to the Killiow estate) the Rosewarnes had kept in good repair, and without demur. But it was clearly understood—and Nicky, a few hours ago, would have asserted it as stubbornly as anyone—that the sole right of taking a passenger on board here

for hire and conveying him across to the town appertained to the Killiow ferryman.

As it happened, however, at the back of Nicky's cottage a narrow lane, public though seldom used, ran down to the waterside, to a shelf of rock less than a stone's throw from the slip, and, when cleared of weed below the tide-mark, by no means inconvenient for embarking passengers. A rusty ring, clamped into the living rock, survived to tell of days before steam-tugs were invented, when vessels had painfully to warp their way up and down the river. Through this ring, no man forbidding him, Mr. Hosken had run a frape, on which he kept his blue boat, now leased to Nicky for a nominal rent of sixpence a week.

"And why not use this for your ferry-landing?" Mr. Hosken suggested. "Rosewarne can't touch ye here."

"Sure?"

"I reckon I ought to know the tithe-maps by heart; and, by them, this parcel of shore belongs to nobody, unless it be to Her Majesty."

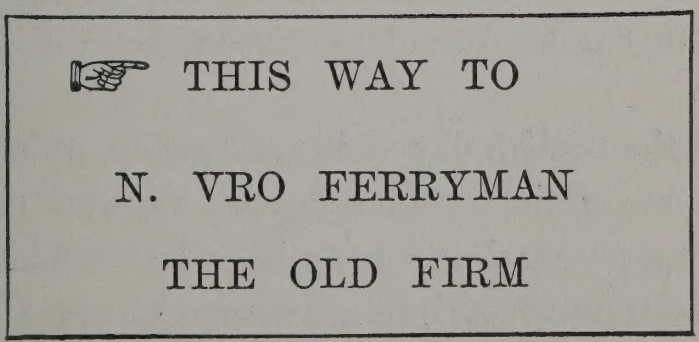
Nicky chuckled with a wheezy cunning.

It happened as he had promised the new ferryman. Mr. Sam's unpopularity had been growing in the village since the eviction of Mrs. Trevarthen. Aunt Butson, after a vain attempt to find labour in the fields, had followed her to the almshouse across

the water. The cause of Mr. Benny's dismissal had been freely canvassed and narrowly guessed at. Against this new stroke of tyranny the public revolted. Living so far from their own church and a mile from the nearest chapel, numbers of the villagers were wont on Sundays to cross over to the town for their religion, and to-day with one consent they stepped into Nicky's blue boat, while Mr. Bobe smoked and spat, and regarded them with a lazy interest. Towards evening the old man jingled a pocketful of coppers.

"Why ever didn't I think o' this before?" he asked aloud. "Here I've a-been near upon fifty years earnin' twelve shillings a week, and all the while might ha' been a rich man and my own master!"

Next day he sought out Mr. Toy, and Mr. Toy obligingly painted and lettered a board for him, and helped to fix it against the wall of his hovel overlooking the lane—



Here was defiance indeed, a flaunted banner of revolt! The villagers, who had hitherto looked upon the old man as half-witted but harmless, suddenly discovered him to be a hero, and Mr. Toy gave himself a holiday to stand beneath the board and explain it to all the country folk coming to use the ferry. So well did he succeed that between sunset and sunrise the only passenger by the official boat was Mr. Sam himself, on his way to seek and take counsel with Lawyer Tulse.

Of their interview no result appeared for ten days, during which Nicky saw himself acquiring wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. Already he despised what at first had been so terrible, the prospect of being turned out of house and home. He could snap his fingers, and let Mr. Sam do his worst. He no longer thought of hiring a bedroom; he would rent a small cottage from Hosken, and perhaps engage a housekeeper. It is to be feared that in these days Nicky gave way to boasting; but much may be forgiven to a man who blossoms out into a hero at eighty.

On the twelfth day of his prosperity, as he rested on his oars off the town-landing and dreamed of a day when, by purchasing a horse-boat, he would deprive the official ferry of its only source of revenue, and close all competition, a seedy-looking man in a frayed

overcoat stepped down the slipway and accosted him.

"Is your name Nicholas Vro?"

"It is; and you'm askin' after the right boat, stranger though you be. Step aboard, mister."

"Thank you," said the seedy-looking man, "but I don't need to cross. The fact is, I've a paper to deliver to you."

Nicky, as he did not mind confessing, was "no scholar"; he could read at the best with great difficulty, and he had left his spectacles at home.

"What's the meaning o' this?" he asked, turning the document over.

"It's an injunction."

"That makes me no wiser, my son."

"It's a paper to restrain you from plying this ferry for hire pending a suit Killiow *versus* Vro in which you are named as defendant."

"'Suit'—'verses'? Darn the fellow, what's to do with verses? Come to me with your verses!" Nicky tossed the injunction contemptuously down in the sternsheets.

"You'll find 'tis the law," said the stranger warningly.

"The law? I've a-seen the law, my friend, over to Bodmin, and 'tis a very different looking chap from you, I can assure 'ee. The law rides in a gilt coach

with trumpets afore it, and two six-foot fellows up behind in silk stockings and powder. The law be that high and mighty it can't even wear its own nat'ral hair. And you come to me stinkin' of beer in a reach-me-down overcoat, and pretend *you* be the law! You'll be tellin' me next you're Queen Victoria. But it shows what a poor kind o' case Rosewarne must have, that he threatens me wi' such a make-believe."

That Nicky had been alarmed for the moment cannot be denied. His uneasiness died away, however, as the days passed and nothing happened. The paper he stowed away at home in the skivet of his chest, and very foolishly said nothing about it even to his neighbour Hosken.

Indeed he had almost forgotten it when, just before Christmas, the stranger appeared again on the slip with another paper.

"Hullo! More verses?"

"You've to show cause why you shouldn't be committed for contempt."

"Oh, have I? Well, a man can't help his feelin's, but I'm sorry if I said anything the other day to hurt yours; for a man can't help his appearance, neither, up to a point."

"You've none too civil a tongue," answered the stranger, "but I think it a kindness to warn you. By

continuing to ply this ferry you're showing contempt for the law, and the law is going to punish you."

Nicky thought this out, but could not understand it at all. If Mr. Sam had a legal right to stop him, why hadn't he sent the police, or at least a "summons"? As for going to prison, that only happened to thieves and criminals. No man could be locked up for pulling a boat to and fro; the notion was absurd on the face of it.

Two days later he sought out Mr. Benny, and showed him the documents.

"I wish you'd make head or tail of 'em for me. They're pretendin' somehow that Queen Victoria herself is mixed up in it. God bless her! and me that have never clapped eyes on her nor wished her aught but in health an' wealth long to live, Amen."

"Oh, Nicky, Nicky!" Mr. Benny leapt up from his chair. "What have you done! and what a criminal fool was I not to keep an eye on you!"

"From all I hear," said Nicky, "you've had enough to do lookin' after yourself. Be it true, as I hear tell, that Rosewarne gave you the sack on my account?"

"Never talk of that," commanded Mr. Benny. "Go you home now, lock up your boat, get a night's rest, and expect me early to-morrow morning. Between this and then I will see what can be done." But

his heart sank as he glanced again at the date on the document.

Indeed he was too late. After an ineffectual interview with Mr. Tulse, the little man rushed off to the ferry, intent on facing Mr. Sam in his den and pleading for mercy. But as he reached the slip the official ferry-boat came alongside, and in the sternsheets beside the town policeman sat Nicky Vro, on his way to Bodmin gaol.

CHAPTER XIX

THE INTERCEDERS

"CLEM!"

The blind child awoke at the touch of his sister's hand on his shoulder, and turned drowsily in his bed.

"Eh? What's the matter?" A moment later he sat up in alarm and put out a hand as if to feel the darkness. "It isn't morning yet!"

"No; but the ground is all covered with snow, and you can't think what funny lights are dancing over it across the sky. I've been watching them for minutes and minutes."

"What sort of lights?"

"I can't tell you, because I never saw the like of them. Sometimes they're white, and sometimes they're violet, and then again green and orange. They run right across the sky like ribbons waving, and once they turned to red and lit up the snow as far as I could see."

"You've been catching your death of cold." Clem could hear her teeth chattering.

"I'm not so very cold," Myra declared bravely. "I took off the counterpane and wrapped it round me. You'll come, won't you, dear?"

Clem knew why he was summoned. Two days ago Susannah had told them of an old woman living at Market Jew who had mixed a pot of green ointment and touched her eyes with it, and ever afterwards seen the fairies. At once Myra, who was naught if not practical, had secreted Susannah's jar of cold cream (kept to preserve the children's skin from freckles) and a phial of angelica-water from the store-closet, and stirred these into a beautiful green paste, and had anointed her own eyes and Clem's with it, using incantations—

"Christ walked a little, a little
Before the sun did rise;
Christ mixed clay with spittle,
And cured a blind man's eyes;
This man, and that man,
And likewise Bartimee—
What Christ did for these poor men
I hope He'll do for me."

The charm, however, had not worked. Perhaps it needed time to operate, and the children had despaired too soon.

"Why didn't you come to me at once?" demanded Clem.

"I didn't dare." Myra trembled now, on the verge of putting her hopes to the touch. Though these were but pisky-lights, what bliss if Clem should behold them! "Besides, I saw a light across the yard in Archelaus Libby's garret. I believe he is awake there, with his telescope, and *he* can't have tried the ointment. You won't be terribly disappointed, dear, if"—

He slid out of bed and took her hand.

He was a brave boy; and when she led him to her window and he saw nothing, his first thought was for her disappointment, to soothe it as well as he might.

"Tell me about it," he whispered, nestling down on the window-seat and drawing her head close to his shoulder; for after the pause that destroyed hope she had broken down, her body shaking with muffled sobs, woeful to feel and to hear. Outside, the Northern Lights—the "merry-dancers"—yet flickered over the snowy roof-ridges and the snowy uplands beyond.

"I am going to dress," she announced, as the gust of sobbing spent itself. "If Archelaus Libby is awake, he will tell us what it means."

"Take me with you."

Though prepared to go alone, she had hoped he would ask this, being—to confess the truth—more

than half afraid of the dark landing and passages below. The two dressed themselves and crept downstairs. In the hall, remembering their former expedition, Myra felt the bolt of the front door cautiously; but this time it was shut. They stole down the side-passage to the kitchen, where a fire burned all night in the great chimney-place on a bed of white wood ashes. Kneeling in the faint glow of it they drew on and laced their boots, then unlatched the kitchen window and dropped out upon the snow.

Archelaus Libby had been given a garret over the cider house, where he slept or studied in a perpetual odour of dried russet apples and Spanish onions. He was awake and dressed, and welcomed the children gaily by the light of a tallow candle. His simple mind found nothing to wonder at in this nocturnal visit. Was not the Aurora Borealis performing in all its splendour? Then naturally the whole world must be awake with him and excited.

He showed Myra its wonders through the telescope, discoursing on them with glee.

"But what does it *mean?*" she asked.

He told her how it was caused, and how a clever man had once made a toy with a bright lamp, a globe sprinkled with ground glass, and the vapour of a sponge pressed on hot iron, repeating the phenomenon

on a tiny scale. "We will try it ourselves to-morrow," he promised.

The ribbons of light were playing hide-and-seek behind a distant wooded hill, now and again so vividly that its outline stood up clear against them.

"That will be the moors above Damelioc," said Archelaus. "If you watch through the glass, you will see the monument there—the one on the battlefield, you know. I saw it, just now, plain as plain. And once I thought I saw the taller monument, over Bodmin."

"That's where they've put Uncle Vro in gaol."

"I was thinking of him just now, Miss Myra. It will be cold for him to-night over there in his cell."

"I wonder if Lady Killiow knows," said Myra musingly.

"They were talking about it in the kitchen to-night," said Archelaus, "and all agreed that she knew naught about it. Miss Susannah was saying that Peter Benny had been across here, bold as a lion, this afternoon, and spoke up to your uncle about it. Their voices were so loud that from the great parlour she heard every word; and Mr. Benny was threatening to tell Lady Killiow what he was doing in her name, and, what's more, to write up to his

brother and get the whole story in the London papers."

"But *has* he told her?"

Clem caught his sister suddenly by the arm. The child was shaking from head to foot. "Peter Benny has not told her! Come away, Myra, and leave Archelaus to his telescope. I want you, back at the house!"

"Why, whatever has taken you?" she asked, believing him ill. Having wished Archelaus good-night and hurried Clem down the garret stairs, she repeated her question anxiously. "Come back to bed, Clem; you're shaking like a leaf!"

"The lights!" stammered the child. "I saw them."

"You saw them!" Myra echoed slowly.

"Yes, yes—over Bodmin and over Damelioc. How far is it to Damelioc?"

"Four or five miles maybe. But, Clem, you don't mean"— She stared into his face by the wan light of the Aurora reflected from the snow. Reading his resolve, she became practical at once. "Stay here and don't stir," she commanded, "while I creep back to the larder and forage."

Dawn overtook them at the lodge-gates of Damelioc; a still dawn, with a clear, steel-blue sky and the

promise of a crisp, bright day. It had been freezing all night, and was freezing still; the snow as yet lay like a fine powder, and so impetuously had they hurried, hand in hand, that along the uplands they scarcely felt the edge of the windless air. But here in the valley bottom, under the trees beside the stream, they passed into a different atmosphere, and shivered. Here, too, for the first half-mile—road and sward being covered alike with snow—Myra had much ado to steer, and would certainly have missed her way but for the black tumbling stream on her right. She knew that the drive ran roughly parallel with it, and never more than a few paces distant from its brink. Twice in her life she had journeyed with her grandmother in high June to Lady Killiow's rose-show, and she remembered being allowed to kneel on the cushions of the "car" and wonder at the miniature bridges and cascades. By keeping close beside the water she could not go wrong.

They halted by a bridge below the lake where the woods divided to right and left at the foot of the great home-park. A cold fog lay over the water and the reedy islands where the wild duck and moorhens were just beginning to stir, but above it a glint or two of sunshine touched the wintry boughs, and while it grew and ran along them and lit up their snowy

upper surfaces as with diamonds, a full morning beam smote on the façade of the house itself, high above the slope, uplifted above the fog as it were a heavenly palace raised upon a base of cloud.

Daunted by the vision, Myra glanced at Clem. His face was lifted towards the sunlight.

"The house!" she whispered. "Oh, Clem, it's ever so much grander than I remembered!" She began to describe it to him, while they divided and munched the crusts she had fetched from Susannah's bread-pan.

"If her palace is as fine as that," said Clem, with great cheerfulness, "she must be a very great lady, and can easily do what we want."

They took hands again and mounted the curving drive to the terrace and the cavernous *porte-cochère,* where hung a bell-pull so huge that Myra had to clasp it in both hands and drag upon it with all her weight. Far in the bowels of the house a bell clanged, deep and hollow-voiced as for a funeral.

A footman answered it—a young giant in blue livery and powder. Flinging wide the vast door, he stared down upon the visitors, and his Olympian haughtiness gave way to a broad grin.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said the footman.

"You may be jiggered or not," answered Myra, with sudden *aplomb* (a moment before, she had been

ready to run), "but we wish to see Lady Killiow. Will you announce us, please?"

Two hours later, when the sun had risen above the trees, Sir George Dinham came riding up through Damelioc Park. He too came to right a wrong, having given his promise to Mr. Benny overnight. He rode slowly, pondering. On his way he noted the footprints of two children on the snow, except by them untrodden; marked how they wandered off here and there towards the stream, but ever returned, regained the way, and held on for Damelioc. He wondered what they might mean.

Lady Killiow received him in her morning-room. She wore a bonnet and a long cloak of sables, and was obviously dressed for a drive. She rose from before her writing-table, where she was sealing a letter.

"I interrupt you?" said Sir George as they shook hands, and glancing out of the window he had a glimpse of the heads of a pair of restless bays. Unheard by him—the snow lying six inches deep before the porch—Lady Killiow's carriage had come round from the stables a minute after his arrival.

"But if I guess your errand," she said, "I was merely about to forestall it. I am driving to Bodmin."

"You knew nothing, then, of this poor old creature's case?"

"My friend, I hope that you too have only just discovered it, or you would have warned me."

"I heard of it last night for the first time. Rosewarne alone is responsible for the prosecution?"

"He only." She nodded towards the letter on the writing-table. "I have asked him to attend here when I return, and explain himself. Meanwhile"—

"But what can you do?"

"The poor soul is in prison."

"That is where I came to offer my help. The Assizes are not over. The same judge who committed him has been delayed there for three days by a *nisi prius* suit—an endless West Cornwall will case."

"You did not suppose, surely, that this was happening with any consent of mine?"

"No," Sir George answered slowly, "I did not. But do you know, Lady Killiow, that, without any consent of ours, you and I have nearly been in litigation over this same wretched ferry?" He smiled at her surprise. "Oh yes, I could help the Radicals to make out a very good case against us!"

"I learned to trust my old steward. It seems that I have carried over my trust too carelessly to this son of his, and with the less excuse because I dislike the man. The fact is, I am getting old."

"May I say humbly that you defend yourself before a far worse sinner in these matters? And may I say, too, that your care for Damelioc and its tenantry has always been quoted in my hearing as exemplary?"

"I am not defending myself. I have been to blame, though," she added with a twinkle, "I do not propose to confess this to my steward. I have been bitterly to blame, and my first business at Bodmin will be to ask this old man's pardon."

"And after?"

"He must be released, and at once. Can this be done by withdrawing the suit? or must there be delays?"

"He must purge his offence, I fear, unless you can persuade the judge to reconsider it. If I can help you in this, I would beg for the privilege."

"Thank you, my friend. I was on the point of asking what you offer. You had best leave your horse here and take a seat in my carriage."

"But," said Sir George, as she moved to the door, "you have not yet told me how you learned the news—who was beforehand with me."

"You shall see." She crossed the corridor, and softly opening a door, invited him to look within. There, in the lofty panelled breakfast-room, at a table reflected as a small white island in a sea of

polished floor, sat Myra and Clem replete and laughing, unembarrassed by the splendid footman who waited on them, and reckless that the huge bunch of grapes at which they pulled was of December's growing.

Sir George laughed too as he looked. "But, good heavens!" said he, remembering the footprints on the drive, "they must have left home before daylight!"

"They started in the dead of night, so far as I can gather. Eh? What is it?" she asked, turning upon another footman, who had come briskly down the corridor and halted behind her, obviously with a message.

"Mr. Rosewarne, my lady. He has just come in by way of the stables. He has seen the carriage waiting, but asks me to say that he will not detain your ladyship a minute."

"He has come for the children, no doubt. Very well; I will see him in the morning-room." As the man held open the door for her she motioned to Sir George to precede her. "I shall defer discussing Mr. Rosewarne's conduct with him. For the moment we have to deal with its results, and you may wish to ask him some questions."

Mr. Sam never committed himself to horseback, but employed a light gig for his journeys to and

from Damelioc. The cold drive having reddened his ears and lent a touch of blue to his nose, his appearance this morning was more than usually unprepossessing.

"I will not detain your ladyship," he began, repeating the message he had sent by the footman. "Ah, Sir George Dinham? Your servant, Sir George! My first and chief business was to recover my runaways, whom your ladyship has so kindly looked after."

"You know why they came?" asked Lady Killiow.

"To tell the truth, I have not yet had an opportunity to question them. Some freak of the girl's, I should guess. The young teacher to whom I give house-room informs me that they were excited last night by an appearance of the Northern Lights—a very fine display, he tells me. I regret that, being asleep, I missed it. He suggested that the pair had set out to explore the phenomenon; and that, very likely, is the explanation—more especially as their footprints led me due northward. My housekeeper tells me that Myra—the elder child—firmly believes a pot of gold to be buried at the foot of every rainbow. A singular pair, my lady! and my late father scarcely improved matters by allowing them to run wild."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Rosewarne. Undoubtedly they followed the Northern Lights; but their purpose you will hardly guess. It was to intercede for an old man of eighty, whom, it appears, I have been cruel enough to lock up in prison."

Mr. Sam's face expressed annoyance and something more.

"I sincerely trust, my lady, they have not succeeded in distressing you."

"I suppose I may thank Heaven, sir, that they at least succeeded so far."

Her tone completely puzzled Mr. Sam, who detected the displeasure beneath it, but in all honesty could not decide whether she blamed him or the children.

"A painful business, my lady. The poor man was past his work—a nuisance to himself and to others. These last scenes of our poor mortality—often, as it seems to us (could *we* be the judges) so unduly protracted— But some steps had to be taken. The ferry was becoming a scandal. I felt called upon to act, and to act firmly. If I may use the expression, your ladyship's feelings in the matter would naturally be those which do honour to your ladyship's sex; they would be, shall I say—er"—

"Why not say 'womanly,' Mr. Rosewarne?"

"Ha, precisely—womanly. I did my best to spare them."

"We will talk of that later. Just now, you will please instruct us how best to release the poor man, and at once. May I remind you that the horses are taking cold?"

"The horses?" Mr. Sam stared from Lady Killiow to Sir George. "Her ladyship doesn't tell me that she was actually proposing to drive to Bodmin?"

"I start within five minutes."

"But it is useless!"

"Useless?"

"The man is dead."

"Mr. Rosewarne"—

Mr. Sam drew a telegram from his pocket. "I received this as I was leaving home. The governor of the prison very kindly communicated with me as soon as the office opened. The prisoner—as I heard from the policeman who escorted him—collapsed almost as soon as they admitted him. I telegraphed at once to the governor, assuring him of my interest in the case and requesting information. This is his reply: '*Vro died three-thirty this morning. Doctor supposes senile decay.*' It was considerate of him to make this addition, for it will satisfy your ladyship that we acted, though unwillingly, with the plainest possible justification. The man was hopelessly past his work."

Sir George, who had been staring out of window, wheeled about abruptly, lifted his head, and gazed at Mr. Sam for some twenty seconds with a wondering interest. Then he turned to Lady Killiow.

"Shall I send back the carriage?"

"Thank you," she said; and he went out, with a glance at her face which silently expressed many things.

"Mr. Rosewarne," she began, when they were alone, "if I began to say what I think of this business, a person of your instincts would at once fall to supposing that I shifted the blame on to your shoulders, which is just the last thing in the world I mean to do. But precisely because I am guilty, and precisely because I accept responsibility for my steward's actions, a steward who conceals his actions is of no use to me. You are dismissed."

CHAPTER XX

AN OUTBURST

"I saw the new moon late yestreen,
Wi' the auld moon in her arm."

"Miss Marvin, does 'yestreen' mean 'last night'?"

"It does."

"Then I wish the fellow would say 'last night,'" grumbled Master Calvin. "And how could the new moon have the old moon in her arm?"

Hester explained.

"But moons haven't arms." He pushed the book away pettishly. "I hate this poetry! Why can't you teach me what I want?"

"That," said Hester, "is just what I am trying to discover. Will you tell me what you want?"

To her amazement, he bent his head down upon his arms and broke into sobbing. "I don't know what I want! Everyone hates me, and I—I hate it all!"

Somehow, Hester—who had started by misliking the child, and only with the gravest misgivings (yielding to pressure from his father) had consented to teach

him in her spare hours—was beginning to pity him. This new feeling, to be sure, suffered from severe and constant checks; for he was unamiable to the last degree, and seldom awoke a spark of liking but he killed it again, and within five minutes, by doing or saying something odious. He differed from other children, and differed unpleasantly. He had taken the full tinge of his sanctimonious upbringing; he was pharisaical, cruel at times, incurably twisted by his father's creed that wrong becomes right when committed by a pious person from pious motives. (His mother had once destroyed a cat because she found herself growing fond of it and believed that a Christian's soul must be weaned of all earthly affections.) He appealed to Hester's pity because, with all this, he was unhappy.

She had been teaching him languidly and inattentively to-day, being preoccupied with a letter in her pocket; and to this letter, having set him to learn his verses from Sir Patrick Spens, she let her thoughts wander. It ran:—

"My dear Miss Marvin,—After much hesitation I have decided to commit to writing a proposal which has been ripening in my mind during our three months' acquaintance. My age and my convictions alike disincline me to set too much store on the emotion men call 'love,' which in my experience is illusory as the attractions provoking it

are superficial. But as a solitary man I have long sighed for the blessings of Christian companionship, or a union founded on mutual esteem and fruitful in well-doing. While from the first not insensible to your charms of person, I have allowed my inclination to grow because I detected in you the superior graces of the mind and a strength of character which could not be other than sustaining to the man fortunate enough to possess you for a helpmeet. In short, my dear Miss Marvin, you would gratify me in the highest degree by consenting to be Mrs. R. I am, as you are probably aware, well-to-do. The circumstance of my being a widower will not, I hope, weigh seriously against this proposal in the mind of one who, while retaining the personal attractions above mentioned, may be reasonably supposed to have set aside the romantic illusions of girlhood. Awaiting your reply, which I trust may be favourable, I remain, yours very truly, S. ROSEWARNE.

"*P.S.*—Your exceptional gifts in the handling of children assure me that my son Calvin would receive from you a care no less than motherly. He would meet it, I feel equally sure, with a responsive affection."

The tone of this letter made Hester tingle as if some of its phrases had been thongs to scourge her.

Yet it must be answered.

That this odious man should have dared—and yet for weeks she had seen it coming. Incredible as she found it that a man from whom every nerve of her body recoiled with loathing should complacently ignore the signs, should complacently persevere in assuming himself to be agreeable and in pressing that

assumption, she had to admit that the offer did not take her wholly by surprise. What bruised her was the insufferable obtuseness of the wording. How was it possible for a human being to sit down in good faith and pen such sentences without guessing that they hurt or insulted?

Nevertheless she blessed the impulse which had prompted him to write; for in writing he could be answered. All day she had gone in dread of meeting him face to face.

Once or twice, while she pondered her answer, she had glanced up at the child, as if *he* could explain his father. What fatal unhappy gift had they both, by which in all that they said or did they earned aversion?

When the child broke down, she arose with a pang of self-reproach, crossed to his chair, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Listen to me, Calvin," she said. "You have told me one thing you want: you want people to like instead of disliking you. Well, the quickest way is to find out what they want, and do it, forgetting yourself; and then, perhaps quite suddenly, you will wake up and discover not only that people like you already, but that you yourself are full of a happiness you can't explain."

The gust of his sobbing grew calmer by degrees.

He lifted his head a little, but not to look her in the face.

"Is that puzzling to you?" she asked. "Well, then, just give it a small trial in practice, and see how it works. I want you, for instance, to learn those verses. You don't like them; but by learning them you will please me, and you want to please me. Try now!"

He pulled the book towards him and bent over it, his head between his hands. After three or four minutes he stood up, red-eyed and a little defiant—

"'I saw the new moon late yestreen,
Wi' the auld moon in her arm;
And if we gang to sea, master,
I fear we'll come to harm.'

They hadna sail'd a league, a league,
A league but barely ane"—

Hester listened with eyes withdrawn, in delicacy avoiding to meet his tear-reddened ones; and just then from the upper floor a scream rang through the house—a child's scream.

Master Calvin heard it, and broke off with a grin.

"That will be Myra," he announced. "She's catching it!"

Had she been less distraught, Hester might have marked and sighed over his sudden relapse into

odiousness. But she had risen with a white face; for scream followed scream overhead, and the sound tortured her.

"You don't tell me"— she began, putting up both hands to her ears. "No, no—there has been some accident! The poor child is calling for help!"

She ran out of the parlour, up the two flights of stairs and along a dark winding corridor, still guided by the screams. At the end of the corridor she found Susannah, pale, wringing her hands, outside a door which, however, she made no attempt to enter.

"Oh, miss, he's killing her!"

"Is the door locked?" panted Hester, at the same time flinging her weight against it as she turned the handle. It flew open, and she confronted—not Myra, but Mr. Sam.

He stood between her and the window with an arm uplifted and in his hand a leathern strap; and while she recoiled for an instant, the strap descended across the naked back and shoulders of little Clem, who drooped under it with bowed knees, helpless, his arms extended, his wrists bound together and lashed to the bed-post. The child made no sound. The piercing screams came not from him, but from an inner room —Myra's bedroom—and from behind a closed door.

"You shall not!" Hester flung herself forward, shielding the child from another blow. "Oh, what

wickedness are you doing! What horrible wickedness!"

Mr. Sam had raised his arm again. The man indeed seemed to be transported with passion, with sheer lust of cruelty. It is doubtful if he had heard her enter. His dark face twitched distortedly in the fading light.

"I'll teach him—I'll teach him!" he panted.

"You shall not!" Hester, covering the child's limp body, could not see his face, but her eyes fell on his little shirt, ripped from neckband to flap, and lying on the floor as it had been torn from his body and tossed aside. She called to Susannah, still lingering doubtfully outside upon the mat, and pointed to the door behind Mr. Sam. Susannah plucked up courage, stepped across and turned the key. An instant later, like a small wild beast uncaged, Myra came springing and crouched beside her brother, facing his tormentor with blazing eyes.

Hester, catching sight of the housekeeper's scissors which Susannah wore at her waist, motioned to her to cut the cords binding Clem's wrists. Mr. Sam made no effort to oppose her, but stood panting, with one hand resting on the dressing-table. Susannah managed indeed to detach the scissors, but held them out falteringly, as though in sheer terror declining all responsibility.

"Give them to me, then."

But as Susannah held them out Myra leapt up and, snatching them, dashed upon her uncle. His hand still rested palm downwards on the dressing-table, and she struck at it. Undoubtedly the child would have stabbed it through—for, strange to say, he made no effort to fend her off or to avoid the stroke—had not Hester run in time to push her smartly by the shoulder in the very act of striking. As it was the scissor-point drove into the table, missing him by a bare two inches. Then and then only he lifted his hand and stared at it stupidly. He seemed about to speak, but turned with a click of the throat—a queer dry sound, as though a sudden thirst parched him—and walked heavily from the room. Hester gazed after him and back at the scissors on the dressing-table. She was reaching forward to pick them up when a cry from Susannah bade her hurry. Clem had fainted, his legs doubled beneath him, his head falling horribly back from his upstretched arms, which still, like ropes, held him fast to the bed-post.

Twenty minutes later Hester descended the stairs. Clem was in bed with his sister's arms about him; and Myra's last look at parting had been one of dumb gratitude, pitifully asking pardon for old jealousies, old misunderstandings. At any other time Hester would have rejoiced over the winning of a friend.

But the sight of the weals on Clem's back had for the moment killed all feeling in her but disgust and horror. So deep was her disgust that the sight of Master Calvin, whom she surprised in the act of listening outside the door, scarcely ruffled it afresh. So complete was her horror that it left no room for astonishment when, reaching the foot of the stairs, she found Mr. Sam himself lingering in the hall, apparently awaiting her.

She walked past him with set face. All the smooth, pietistic phrases of his letter rang a chime in her brain, to be retorted upon him as soon as he dared to speak.

But he did not speak. He looked up, as if awaiting her; took half a step forward; then drew aside and let her pass. She went by with set face, not sparing a look for him. In the open air she drew a long breath.

Above all things she desired to consult with Peter Benny. In this there was nothing surprising, for everyone in trouble went to Peter Benny. He himself—honest man—had to admit that the number of confidences which came his way were, no doubt, extraordinary. He explained it on the simple ground that he wrote letters for seamen and made it a rule never to divulge their secrets. "Not that anyone

would dream of it," he added; "but my secrecy, happening to be professional, gets its credit advertised."

It appeared that these professional duties were heavier than usual to-night. At any rate, when Hester reached the little cottage by the quayside, it was to find that he had made a hasty tea and departed for the office. In her urgency, after merely telling Mrs. Benny that she would be back in a few minutes, Hester ran down the court to the office, tapped hurriedly at the door, and pushed it open.

Within, with his back towards her, erect and naked to the waist under the rays of an oil lamp swinging from the beam, stood a young man. The light falling on his firm shoulders and the muscles along his spine showed the gleaming flesh tattooed with interwoven patterns, delicate as lace-work; and in the midst, reaching from shoulder-blade to shoulder-blade, a bright blue tree with a cross above, and beneath it, the figures of Adam and Eve.

As she drew back, Mr. Benny on the far side of the office raised his eyes from a table over which he bent to dip a needle in a saucer of Indian ink; and at the same moment the young man under the lamp, suddenly aware of a visitor, faced about with a shy laugh. It was Tom Trevarthen. Hester, with a short

cry of dismay, backed into the darkness, shutting the door as she retreated. When Mr. Benny returned to supper he forbore from alluding to the incident until Hester—her trouble still unconfided—shook hands with him for the night.

"I've heard," he said, "folks laugh at sailors for tattooing themselves. But 'tis done in case they're drowned, that their bodies may be known; and, if you look at that, 'tis a sacrament surely."

That night Hester awoke from a terrifying dream; and still, as she dreamed again, she saw a lash descending on a child's naked back, leaving at each stroke the mark of a cross interwoven with a strange and delicate pattern; and at each stroke heard a girl's voice which screamed, "It is a sacrament!"

CHAPTER XXI

MR. BENNY GETS PROMOTION

Early next morning, having bound Mr. Benny to secrecy, she told him the whole story. At first his face merely expressed horror; but by and by his forehead lost its puckers. When she had done, his first comment took her fairly aback.

"Ay," said he, "I'd half guessed it a'ready. The poor creature's afflicted. It don't stand in nature for a man to deal around cruelty as he's been doing unless his brain is touched."

"Afflicted is he?" Hester answered indignantly. "I'm afraid I keep all my pity for those he afflicts."

"Then you do wrong," replied Mr. Benny, with much gravity. "That man wants help if ever a man did."

"He will get none from me, then," she said, and flushed, remembering the proposal in her pocket. "I won't endure the sight of him, after yesterday's work. I have written a letter resigning my teachership."

"That isn't like you, somehow." Mr. Benny stood musing.

"Of course," she went on hastily, "I don't give my real reasons. The letter is addressed to you as Clerk, and you will have to read it to the Board. I am ready to fill the post until another teacher can be found."

"It seemed to me, some while ago, that Mr. Samuel had a fancy for you. Maybe I'm wrong, my dear; but you won't mind my speaking frankly. And if I'm right, and he has begun pestering you, I can't blame you for resigning. The man isn't safe."

His look carried interrogation at once shy and fatherly. She forced herself to meet his eyes and nod the answer which her cheeks already published.

"It is hateful," she murmured. "Yes, he asked me to marry him."

"I *told* you he was afflicted," said Mr. Benny, still with simple seriousness; then, catching a sudden twinkle in her eyes, "Eh? What did I say? My dear, I didn't mean it that way!"

Mr. Benny had judged at once more charitably and more correctly than Hester. Had she looked up yesterday when she passed Mr. Sam at the foot of the stairs, she might have guessed the truth from his face.

The man was afflicted, and knew it; had suddenly discovered it, and was afraid of himself—for the moment, abjectly afraid. All his life he had been nursing a devil, feeding it on religion, clothing it in self-righteousness, so carefully touching up its toilet that it passed for saint rather than devil—especially in his own eyes, trained as they were in self-deception. For every action, mean or illiberal or tricky or downright cruel, he had a justificatory text; for his few defeats a constant salve in the thought that his vanquishers were carnal men, sons of Belial, and would find themselves in hell some day. He was Dives or Lazarus as occasion served. If a plan miscarried, the Lord was chastening him; if, as oftener happened, it went prosperously, the Lord was looking after His own; but always the plan itself, being *his* plan, was certainly righteous, because he was a righteous man. A good tree could not bring forth evil fruit.

But all this while the devil had been growing fat and strong; and now on a sudden it had burst forth like a giant, mad, uncontrollable, flinging away disguise, a devil for all to see. There was no text, even in Solomon, which could be stretched to excuse tying up a small blind child and flogging him with a belt. He had done a thing for which men go to prison. Worse, he had not been far from a crime

for which the law puts men to death. In his rage he had been absolutely blind, each blow deadening prudence, calling for another blow. If Hester Marvin had not run in, where would he have ended?

It happened to him now as it has happened to many a man fed upon conventional religion and accustomed to walk an aisle in public and eminent godliness. In the moment that he overbalanced public approval his whole edifice crumbled and collapsed, leaving him no stay. He was down from his eminence —down with the wild beasts; and among them the worst was the wild beast within him.

He had not philosophy enough even to render account with himself why he hated the small blind child. One reason, and perhaps the chief, was that he had already injured Clem; another, that Clem stood all unconsciously between his conscience and his son Calvin. In his fashion Mr. Sam loved his son, doomed to suffer, if the truth should ever be known, for his father's bastardy. But—to his credit perhaps—Mr. Sam forgot all excuses in sheer terror of himself; terror less of what he had done than of what he might hereafter do.

In panic of that devil he had placed himself in Hester's way, hoping against hope that she might help. He had built some hopes on her, and now in an hour or two all these hopes were merged in

a desperate appeal to be saved from himself. He almost forgot that he had written asking her to be his wife; he could think only that she might possibly be his salvation. But Hester had passed him by without a glance. After this, meaning no cruelty at all, but merely from the instinct of self-preservation (than which nothing is crueller) he did, as will be seen, the cruellest deed of his life.

Mr. Benny was one of those rare souls who never dream of asking a favour for themselves, but can be shamelessly importunate on behalf of a fellow-creature. On receipt of Hester's resignation, which she submitted to him first in private and then sent to him formally through the post, he panted up the hill to seek an interview with Sir George Dinham.

"Dear me!" said Sir George; "it happens oddly that I was on the point of sending for you for the first time; and yet you have been my tenant for close upon twenty years, I believe?"

Mr. Benny might have seized the occasion to urge that his roof leaked and the quay wall beneath his office badly needed repointing. For years he had submissively relieved Sir George of these and other repairs. But he had come to engage Sir George's interest for Miss Marvin, a young person who had just thrown up her position as schoolmistress

across the water, in circumstances perfectly honourable to her. Sir George, perhaps, would not press to know what those circumstances were; but Mr. Benny had chanced to hear that the Matron of the Widows' Almshouses had earned her pension and was resigning, and he ventured to recommend Miss Marvin for the post.

"And that again is odd," said Sir George, "for I was wondering if the situation would be agreeable to her."

Mr. Benny could scarcely believe his ears.

"But I think," pursued Sir George, "we had better take one thing at a time; and I wish to get the first job off my hands, because, strictly speaking, it is not my business. Lady Killiow (as you may have heard) requires a new steward, and has commissioned me to choose him for her. I had thought of you, Mr. Benny."

"Sir George!"

"Why not? You were clerk to the late Mr. Rosewarne and enjoyed his confidence, I believe?"

"Sir George—Sir George!" Mr. Benny could only repeat with stammering lips. If, a while ago, he could not believe his ears, just now he felt as if the sky were tumbling about them.

"There, my friend, go home and think it over. If you think well of the offer, be at the ferry at nine

o'clock to-morrow. I will meet you there with the dogcart, and we can talk matters over on our way to Damelioc. From Damelioc, after your interview with Lady Killiow, we will drive straight to Bodmin; for I think you may be able to guess the first task she will lay upon you as her steward."

But Mr. Benny was too far bewildered.

"She will ask you, if I am not mistaken, to make arrangements for bringing home old Nicholas Vro's body and burying him where, as he would have said, he belongs to lie—in his own parish churchyard. There are no relatives to be consulted?"

"Neither chick nor child, kith nor kin, Sir George."

"God forgive me, I had come near saying 'so much the better.' Lady Killiow is a proud woman, as you know, and of a pride that would rejoice in bearing the fullest blame and making fullest amends. But her friends can only be glad to get this scandal over and as quietly as may be. I have written for the necessary order."

Once before we have seen Mr. Benny tempted to keep a secret from his wife. This time he would have told, but could not. He sat down to tea with a choking breast and a heart so big within him that it left no room for food. He strove to eat, but could get no

morsel past his lips. At one moment the news seemed to bubble up within him, and his mouth opened to shout it aloud; the next, his courage failed at his own vaunting thoughts, and he reached a hand down to the table-leg, to "touch wood," as humble men do to avert Nemesis if by chance they have let slip a boastful word. Once he laughed outright, wildly, at nothing whatever.

Nuncey set down the teapot and eyed her parent with a puzzled frown. That frown had sat too often on her cheerful face during the past three months. In truth, Mr. Benny as a regrater fell disastrously short of success, being prone to sell at monstrous overweights, which ate up the profits. When Nuncey at length forbade him to touch the scales, he gave away apples to every child that chose to edge around the tail of the cart.

"There's something wrong with father to-night," she said. "He's like a thing hurried-in-mind. What's up with 'ee, my dear?—is it verses?" She paused with a sudden dark suspicion. "I see'd William Badgery walkin' after you down the street. Don't tell me you've let 'en persuade you into buying that lot of eggs he was preachin' up for fresh? for, if you have, I get no shoes this Christmas—that's all. Fresh? He've been salting them down these three months, against the Christmas prices, and no

size in 'em to start with. I wouldn't sell 'em for sixpence the dozen."

"Shoes?" Good Lord, what a question these boots and shoes had been for all these years! Never a Saturday came round (it seemed to him) but one or other of the family wanted soleing or heeling. And henceforth they could all have shoes to their heart's content—and frocks—and new suits—and meat on the table without stint—

He set down his cup and rose hurriedly. In the act of pushing back his chair he met his wife's eyes. They were watching him with anxious concern—not with apparent love; but he alone knew what love lay behind that look which once or twice of late he had surprised in them. His own filled with sudden tears. No, he could not tell her now. To-night, perhaps, when he and she were alone, he would tell her, as so often he had told his worries and listened to hers. He dashed his frayed cuff across his eyes and fairly bolted from the room.

"It's about Nicky Vro that he's troublin'," said Mrs. Benny. "Terrible soft-hearted he is; but you ought to know your father better by this time than to upset 'en so."

An hour later word came to Hester—it was Shake who brought it—that Mr. Benny would be glad to

see her in the office. She obeyed at once, albeit with some trepidation when she came to mount the steps and tap at the door. She had learnt, however, from Nuncey that certain nights were set aside for tattooing. Doubtless this would not be one of them.

Four seamen sat within by the stove, and under the light of the swinging lamp, smoking, patiently awaiting their turn. In the fog of tobacco smoke, which almost took Hester's breath away, they rose politely and saluted her. Big, shy boys they seemed to her, with the whites of their eyes extraordinarily clear against their swarthy complexions. Somehow she felt at home with them instantly, and no more afraid than if they had been children in her school.

One of them called Mr. Benny from the tiny inner office, or cupboard, where he conducted his confidential business, and the little man came running out in a flurry with one hand grasping a handkerchief and the other nervously thrust in his dishevelled hair.

"You will forgive me, my dear, for sending? The truth is, I am at my wits' end to-night and cannot concentrate myself. I have heard news to-day—no, nothing to distress me—on the contrary"— He gazed round helplessly. "It has upset me, though. I was wondering if you will be very kind and help me?"

"Help you?" echoed Hester. "Oh, Mr. Benny,

you surely don't ask me to write your letters for you!"

"Not if you would find it distasteful, my dear."

"But I don't know; I assure you I haven't an idea how to do it!"

"You would find it come easy, for that matter." Mr. Benny drew a quill pen from behind his right ear, eyed its point dejectedly for a moment, and replaced it. "But, of course, if you feel like that, we'll say no more about it, and I'm sorry to have troubled you."

"If it's merely writing down from dictation"—

"You will find it a little more than *that*," Mr. Benny admitted.

Hester looked around on the faces of the seamen. They said nothing; they even watched her with sympathy, as though, while dumbly backing Mr. Benny's petition, they felt him to be asking too much; yet she divined that they were disappointed.

"I will try," she said with sudden resolve, and their approving murmur at once rewarded her. "Only you must be patient and forgive my mistakes."

"That's a very good lass," said one of them aloud, as Mr. Benny shook her by the hand and led her triumphantly to the little inner office. Hester heard the words, and in spite of nervousness was glad that she had chosen to be brave.

The inner office contained a desk, a stool, and a deal chair. These, with a swinging lamp, a shelf of books, and a Band of Hope Almanack, completed its furniture. Indeed, it had room for no more, and its narrow dimensions were dwarfed just now by an enormous black-bearded seaman seated in the chair by the window, which stood open to the darkness. Although the month was December, the wind blew softly from the south-west, and night had closed in with a fine warm drizzle of rain. Beyond the window the riding-lights of the vessels at anchor shone across the gently heaving tide.

The black-bearded seaman made a motion to rise, but realising that this would seriously displace the furniture, contented himself with a "Good-evening, miss," and dropped back in his seat.

"Good-evening," answered Hester. "Mr. Benny here has asked me to take his place. I hope you don't mind?"

"Lord bless you, I like it."

"But I shall make a poor hand of it, I'm afraid."

The man eyed her solemnly for five or six seconds, slowly turned the quid of tobacco in his cheek, and spat out of window. "We'll get along famous," he said.

"He likes the window open," explained Mr. Benny, "because"—

"I see." Hester nodded.

"But I'll run and fetch a cloak for you." Without waiting for an answer, Mr. Benny hurried from the office.

To be deserted thus was more than Hester had bargained for, and for a moment she felt helplessly dismayed. A sheet of paper, half-covered with writing, lay on the desk, and she put out a hand for it.

"Is this your letter? Perhaps you'll allow me to read it and see how far you and Mr. Benny have gone."

"That's the way. Only you mustn' give me no credit for it: I sits and looks on. 'Never take a hand in a business you don't know'—that's my motto."

Hester wished devoutly that it had also been hers. She picked up the paper and read—

"DEAR WIFE,—This comes hoping to find you in health as it leaves me at present, and the children hearty. We made a good passage, and arrived at Troy on the 14th inst., a romantic little harbour picturesquely situated on the south coast of Cornwall. Once a flourishing port, second only to London and Bristol, and still retaining in its ivy-clad fort some vestiges of its former glories, it requires the eye of imagination to summon back the days when (as Hals tells us) it manned and sent forth more than forty ships to the siege of Calais, A.D. 1347"—

Hester glanced at her client dubiously.

"That's all right, ain't it?" he asked.

"Ye—es."

"Far as I remember, it tallies with the last letter he fixed up for me. Something about 'grey old walls' there was, too."

"Yes, that comes two sentences below—

"Confronted with these evidences of decay, the visitor instinctively exclaims to himself, 'If these grey old walls could speak, what a tale might they not unfold!'"—

"So he've put that in again? There's what you might call a sameness about Benny, though he *do* write different to anybody else."

"And here are more dates, and an epitaph from one of the tombstones in the churchyard! Indeed, Mr."—

"Salt. Tobias Salt—*and* by natur'."

"Indeed, Mr. Salt, I can't write a letter like this. To begin with, I haven't the knowledge."

"The Lord forbid!"

"But I suppose your wife likes to read about these things?"

"She can't read a word, bless you. She gets the parson to spell it out to her, or the seamen's missionary. Yarmouth our home is."

"She likes to hear about them, then?"

"What? Sarah? Lord love ye, miss, you should see the woman!" Mr. Salt chuckled heavily, and

wound up by sending a squirt of tobacco-juice out into darkness. "Mother of eight children, she is, and makes 'em toe the mark at school and Sunday school. A woman like that don't bother about grey old walls."

"You are proud of her, I see."

"'Ought to be, I reckon. Why, to-day she can pick up two three-gallon pitchers o' water and heft 'em along for a mile and more without turning a hair."

"And the children? How old are they?"

"Eldest just turned eleven."

"Why, then he must be able to read?"

"'Tisn' a he, 'tis a her. Ay, I reckon 'Melia Jane should read well before this."

Hester took a fresh sheet of paper and began to write. "Listen to this, please," she said after a few sentences, "and tell me if it will do—

"DEAR WIFE,—This comes hoping to find you in health, as it leaves me at present, and the children hearty. I am sending this from Troy, and I daresay you will take it to some friend to read; but tell Amelia Jane, with my love, that in future she shall read her father's letters to you. She must be getting a scholar by this time; and if there's anything she can't explain, why you can take it to a friend afterwards. We reached this port last Tuesday (the 14th) after a good passage—

"Now tell me about your passage, please."

At first Mr. Salt could only tell her that the passage had been a good one, as passages go. But

by feeding him with a suggestion or two, as men feed a pump with a little water to make it work, by and by she found herself listening to information in a flood. Now and then she interposed a question, asking mainly about his wife and the home at Yarmouth. She had picked up her pen again, and he, absorbed in his confidences, did not perceive at what a rate she was making it travel over the paper.

The door opened, and Mr. Benny reappeared with a shawl on his arm. He glanced around nervously. "Mr. Salt, Mr. Salt! I put it to you, this isn't quite fair. A fine talk I can hear you're having; but our friends outside are getting impatient, and want to know when you'll let Miss Marvin begin."

"All right, boss. I've had a yarn here that's worth all the money. Here's your shilling for it, and the letter can stand over till to-morrow."

"But I've written it!" Hester exclaimed.

"Written it!" Mr. Salt's jaw dropped in amazement.

"I don't know if it will do. Shall I read it over?"

"Well, but this beats conjuring!" The reading ended, Mr. Salt slapped his massive thigh.

"You have done very well, my dear," said Mr. Benny; "very well indeed. You have caught, as I might say, the note. Now I myself have great

difficulty in being literary and at the same time catching the note."

There was something in the little man's confession—so modest, so generous withal—which drew tears to her eyes, though her own elation may have had some share in them.

"Though there's one thing she've forgotten," said Mr. Salt, with a twinkle. "My poor Sarah will get shock enough over this letter as 'tis; but she'll get a worse one if we leave out the money order."

The order having been made out in form, ready for him to take to the post office, Mr. Salt bade farewell. They could hear him extolling, on his way through the outer office, the talent of the operator within.

"I feel like a dentist!" whispered Hester, turning to Mr. Benny with a smile. The little man was looking at her wistfully.

"Shall I call in the next?" he asked. "I am afraid, my dear, you are finding this a longer job than you bargained for."

"But I am enjoying it," she protested. "That is, if— Mr. Benny, you are not annoyed by his foolish praises?"

"My dear," he answered gravely, "they say that all literary persons are jealous. If I were jealous it would not be because Mr. Salt praised you, but be-

cause my own sense tells me that you do better than I what I have been doing for twenty years."

"If you feel like that, I won't write another letter," declared Hester.

"That would be very foolish, my dear. And now I will tell you another thing. Suppose that this discovery hurt me a little, yet see how good God is in keeping back all these years until a moment when my heart happens to be so full of good news that it forgets the soreness in a moment; and again, how wise in gently correcting and reminding me of weakness when I might be puffing myself up and believing that all my good fortune came of my own merit."

"What is your good news, dear Mr. Benny?"

"You shall hear later on when I have told my wife."

More than an hour later, having dismissed her clients (for the last of whom she had to compose a love-letter, the first she had written in her life), Hester stepped across to the cottage to announce that her work was over and ask if she might now turn down the lamps and rake out the stove.

The Bennys' kitchen at first glance was uninhabited; and yet, as she opened the door, she had heard voices within. Dropping her eyes to a lower

level, she halted on the threshold and would have withdrawn without noise. In the penumbra beyond the circle of the lamp and the white tablecloth Mr. and Mrs. Benny, Nuncey, and Shake were kneeling by their chairs on the limeash, giving thanks.

While Hester hesitated, the little man lifted his head, and, catching sight of her, sprang to his feet. "Step ye in, my dear, and join with us! For you, too, have news to hear and be thankful for."

"But tell me your own good news and let me first be thankful for that."

"Do 'ee really feel like that towards us?" asked Nuncey, rising and coming forward with joy and eager love in her eyes.

"I ought to, surely, after these months of kindness."

"Well, then—but first of all I must kiss 'ee, you dear thing!—well, then, Dad's been offered Damelioc stewardship, and you're to be Mistress of the Widows' Houses, and we're all going to be rich as Creases for ever and ever, Amen!"

"Crœsus, my dear—besides, we're going to be nothing of the sort," protested her father.

Nuncey swept down upon him, caught him in her strong embrace, implanted a sound kiss on the top of his head, and held him at arms' length with a hand on either shoulder.

"You're a dear little well-to-do father, and the best in the world. But oh! you've come nigh breaking my heart these three months—for a worse regrater there never was, an' couldn' be!"

"Upon my word," said Mr. Benny, glancing over her shoulder at Hester with a twinkle, "I seem to be getting good fortune with a heap of chastening."

CHAPTER XXII

CLEM IS LOST TO MYRA

The post of "Mistress" to the Widows' Houses was a somewhat singular one. The hospital itself had been founded in 1634 by an ancestor of Sir George Dinham's, and dedicated to St. Peter, as a retreat for eleven poor women, widows of husbands drowned at sea. From a narrow cobbled lane, behind the parish church and in the shadow of its tower, you passed into a quadrangle, two sides of which were formed by the lodgings, twelve in number (the twelfth occupied by the caretaker, or Mistress), the other two by the wash-house and store-buildings. In the centre of this courtyard stood a leaden pump, approached by four pebbled paths between radiating beds of flowers—Provence roses, Madonna lilies, and old perennials and biennials such as honesty, sweet-william, snapdragon, the pink and white everlasting pea, with bushes of fuchsia, southernwood, and rosemary. Along the first floor of the alms-buildings ran a deep open gallery, or upstairs cloister, where in warm weather the old women sat and knitted or gossiped in the shade.

The rule restricting admission to the widows of drowned mariners had been gradually relaxed during the last fifty years, and was now a dead letter; aged spinsters even, such as Aunt Butson, being received in default of applicants with better title. Also Sir George's father, having once on a time been called upon to depose a caretaker for ill-using the inmates, had replaced her by a gentlewoman; and thinking to safeguard them in future by increasing the dignity of the post, had rebuilt and enlarged the new Mistress's lodgings, and increased her salary by endowment to eighty pounds per annum.

All this Sir George explained very delicately to Hester, on the morning of Nicky Vro's funeral, having called at the school to seek an interview on his way back from the churchyard.

"But I am not a decayed gentlewoman," Hester objected; "at least, not yet. I shall be standing in the way of someone who really wants this post, while I am strong and able to earn my living. Also —please do not think me ungrateful or conceited— to teach is my calling, and I take a pride in it."

"From all I hear, you have a right to take pride in it. But may I say that these objections occurred to me and that I have a scheme for removing them—a very happy scheme, if you will help. Now, in the first place, will you put the personal question out of

sight and consider my scheme on its merits? And next, will you, in advising me, take account of my ignorance?"

Hester smiled. "I know," she said, "that kindness can be cunning. I am going to be on my guard."

"Well, but listen at any rate," he pleaded, with an eager stammer. "Won't you agree with me that the education you give these children here is dreadfully wasteful?"

She glanced at him keenly. "If you are taking the ordinary ratepayer's view"— she began.

"I am not taking the ordinary ratepayer's view, except to this extent—that I think the ratepayers' and taxpayers' money should be spent to the best advantage. But is it?—either here or in any parish in England?"

"No, it is not."

"Will you tell me why, Miss Marvin?"

"Because," answered Hester, "we do a little good and then refuse to follow it up. If we were to take a child and say, 'You shall be a farm labourer,' or 'You shall be a domestic servant, and in due time marry a labourer and rear his family;' and if, content with this, we were to teach these children just enough for their fate—the boy to plough and work a threshing machine and touch his cap

to his betters, the girl to cook and sew and keep house on sixteen shillings a week—why, then there might be something to say for us. We have not the heart to do this, and yet in effect we do more cruelly. We are not tyrants enough to take a child of eight and label him for life: we start him on a kind of education which seems to offer him a chance; and then, just as the prospect should be opening, we suddenly lose interest in him, wash our hands of him, turn him adrift. Some few—a very few—have the grit to push on, unhelped by us, and grasp their opportunity. But for one of these a thousand and more fall back on their fate, and of our teaching the one thing they keep is discontent. We have built a porch, to nowhere. We invest millions; and just as our investment begins to repay us splendidly, we sell out, share by share. That is why I think sometimes, Sir George, in my bitterness, that education in England must be the most wasteful thing in the world."

"If, in this corner of England, someone were to set himself to fight this waste, would you help?"

"As Mistress of the Widows' Houses?"

Sir George laughed. "As Mistress of the Widows' Houses—and of a school attached. I am thinking of a Charterhouse or a Christ's Hospital in a small way; a foundation, that is, to include the

old charity and a new and efficient school; modern education worked on lines of the old collegiate mediæval systems—eh, Miss Marvin? To me, a high Tory, those old foundations are still our best models."

"Three or four of them have survived," said Hester gravely, and with as little of irony as she could contrive. "Forgive me, Sir George—once more I am going to speak ungratefully—but though neglect be our chief curse just now, a worse may follow when rich folks wake up and endow education in a hurry."

"You condemn me offhand for a faddist?"

"If you would only see that these things need an apprenticeship! Take this very combination of school and hospital. Three or four have survived, and are lodged in picturesque buildings, where they keep picturesque old customs, and seem to you very noble and venerable. So indeed they are. But what of the hundreds that have perished? And of these survivors can you tell me one in which either the school or the almshouse has not gone to the wall? The school, we will say, grows into an expensive one for the sons of rich men; the almshouse dwindles from a college for poor gentlemen down to a home into which wealthy men job their retired servants. I grant you that our modern attempts to combine almsgiving with teaching are not much better as a rule—

are, perhaps, even a little worse. If you have ever walked through one of our public orphanages, for instance"—

Sir George's face fell. "I have never visited one, Miss Marvin, and I subscribe perhaps to half a dozen—out of sheer laziness, and because to subscribe comes easier than to say 'No.' Yes; I am an incurable amateur, and you are right, no doubt, in laughing at my scheme and refusing to look at it."

"But I don't, Sir George. I even think it may succeed, as it deserves, and reward your kindness. Yes, and I have been arguing against myself as much as against you, to warn myself against hoping too much. For there must be disappointments."

"What disappointments?"

"Well, to begin with, you rich folks are impatient; you expect your money to buy success at once and of itself. And then you expect gratitude."

"I do not," Sir George asserted stoutly.

"At least," said Hester, "it is only too plain that you are not getting it." She dropped him a small deprecatory curtsey and laughed. "And yet I *am* grateful."

"Yes," he answered gravely; "I understand. But since you do not quite despise my scheme, will you come and discuss it with me, believing only that I am in earnest?"

So it was arranged that Hester should call on him next evening and go through the plans he had been preparing for a week past. That such an interview defied convention scarcely crossed her mind or his, Sir George being one of those men who can neglect convention because their essential honour stands above question. He received her in his library, and for an hour they talked as might two men of business in friendly committee for some public good.

"By the way," said he, glancing up from his papers, "you were talking yesterday of public orphanages. Have you heard that your little friend Clem—the blind child—has been packed off to one?"

"To an orphanage?" Hester echoed. "The children were not at school to-day, but I had not heard a sound of this."

"It is true; for I happened to call in at the station this morning, and there on the platform I met Rosewarne with the child. The man was taking his ticket to Paddington—a single ticket half-fare; and overhearing this as we stood together by the booking-office, I made bold to ask him a few questions. The child was to travel alone, in charge of the guard; to be met at the journey's end, I suppose, by an official, and taken out to the orphanage—I forget its name—an institution for the blind somewhere out in the south-eastern suburbs."

"Poor Myra!"

"'Poor Clem!' I should rather say. He was not crying over it, but he looked pretty forlorn and white, and his blindness made it pitiable. I call it brutal; the man at least might have travelled up for company. A journey of three hundred miles!"

Nevertheless, Hester chiefly pitied Myra. As for Clem, the news relieved her mind in part; since after witnessing Mr. Sam's outburst, she had more than once shivered at the thought of child and uncle continuing to live under one roof.

Poor Myra had spent the day pacing up and down her room like a caged beast. The fate decreed and overhanging Clem had been concealed from her. Had it been less incredible, instinct surely would have wakened her suspicions before the last moment. At the last moment Susannah, having to dress the child for his journey, met inquiries with the half-hearted lie that he was bound on a trip to Plymouth with his uncle, to meet Aunt Hannah, and return after a day or two in the *Virtuous Lady*. Susannah—weak soul—had furthered the conspiracy because she too had begun to fear for Clem, and wished him well clear of his uncle's roof. She acted "for the best," but broke down in the act of tearing the children asunder, and told her lie shamefacedly. The result

was that Mr. Sam, hearing Myra's screams overhead as he paced the hall, had rushed upstairs, caught her by both wrists as she clung to her brother, forced her into her own bedroom, and turned and pocketed the key.

Four times since, in that interminable day of anguish, Susannah had come pleading and whimpering to the door with food. Mr. Sam, on returning from the station, had given her the key with instructions to release the girl on a promise of good behaviour.

"Be sensible, Miss Myra—now, do! 'Tis to a home he's gone, where he'll be looked after and taught and tended, and you'll see him every holidays. A fine building, sure 'nough! Look, I've brought you a picture of it!"

Susannah, defying instructions, had unlocked and opened the door. Myra snatched the paper from her—it was, in fact, a prospectus of the institution—crumpled it up and thrust it in her pocket. With that, the last gust of her passion seemed to spend itself. She turned, and walking straight to the window-seat, coiled herself among the cushions with face averted and chin upon hand. To Susannah the traitress she deigned no word.

Thrice again Susannah came pleading, each time with a tray and something to tempt Myra's appetite.

Myra did not turn her head. Departing for the fourth time, Susannah left the door ajar. The siege, then, was raised, the imprisonment over. Myra listened to her footsteps descending the stairs, walked to the door, shifted the key from the outer to the inner keyhole, and locked herself in. By this time the wintry dusk had begun to fall. Resuming her seat by the window, she fell to watching the courtyard again, her body motionless, her small brain working.

Dusk had deepened to darkness in the courtyard when she heard a footfall she recognised. It was Archelaus Libby's, on his way home from school to his loft, to deposit his books there and wash before seeking his tea in the kitchen.

Myra straightened her body, and opened the window softly.

"Archelaus!" she called as loudly as she dared.

"Miss Myra?" The footsteps halted.

"Hush, Archelaus, and come nearer. I want you to do something for me."

"Yes, Miss Myra."

"It may get you into trouble. I want you to fetch the short ladder from under the linhay, and fix it against the window here, without making a noise."

For a moment he made no answer. But he had understood; for she heard him walking away towards the linhay, and by and by he returned panting, and

sloped the ladder against the sill as she bade him. By this time Myra had found a plateful of biscuits, and crammed her pocket full, and was ready to descend.

"But what is the meaning of it?" asked Archelaus, as she clambered down to him.

"They have stolen away Clem, and this morning they locked me in. Now take the ladder back and hang it in its place, and I will thank you for ever and ever."

"But I don't understand!" protested Archelaus. "Stolen away Master Clem? Who has stolen him? And what are you going to do?"

"I am going to find him—that's all," said Myra, and ran off into the darkness.

She could reckon on two friends in the world—Mr. Benny and Tom Trevarthen. Aunt Hannah was far away, and Miss Marvin (though now forgiven, and indeed worshipped for having interfered to protect Clem from his flogging) could not be counted on for effective help.

Tom Trevarthen and Mr. Benny—it was on Tom that she pinned her hope; for Tom (she had heard) was shipped on board the *One-and-All* schooner; and the *One-and-All* was ready to sail for London; and somewhere near London—so the paper in her pocket had told her—lay the dreadful place in which Clem was hidden. She could find the vessel; the *One-and-*

All was moored—or had been moored last night—at the buoy under the hill, ready for sea. But to find the vessel and to find Tom Trevarthen were two very different things. To begin with, Tom would be useless unless she contrived to speak with him alone; to row straight to the schooner and hail her would spoil all. Moreover, on the night before sailing he would, most likely, be enjoying himself ashore. But where? Peter Benny might be able to tell. Peter Benny had a wonderful knack of knowing the movements of every seaman in the port.

She ran down the dark street to the alley over which poor Nicky Vro's signboard yet glimmered in the light of the oil lamp at the entrance. The cottage still lacked a tenant, and it had been nobody's business to take the board down. On the frape at the alley's end his ferry-boat lay moored as he had left it. Myra tugged at the rope and drew the boat in.

As it drew alongside out of the darkness she leapt on board and cast off. The paddles, as she laboriously shipped them between the thole-pins, were unconscionably heavy; she knew little of rowing, and nothing of double-sculling. But the tide helped her. By pulling now one paddle, now another, she worked the boat across and down towards the ladder and the quay-door at the end of Mr. Benny's yard.

Nearing it, she found herself in slack water, and the boat became more manageable, giving her time between the strokes to glance over her shoulder and scan the dark shadow under the longshore wall, where each garden and alley-way had its quay-door and its ladder reaching down into the tide. Now the most of these quay-doors were painted green or blue, but Mr. Benny's a light grey, which in the darkness should have made it easily discernible. Yet for some while she could not find it.

Suddenly, as she threaded her way along, scarcely using her paddles now except to fend off the boats which, lying peaceably at their moorings, seemed to crowd around with intent to impede her, a schooner's masts and spars loomed up before her high against the inky night. Then she understood. The vessel—her name, the *One-and-All*, in white letters on her forward bulwarks, glimmered into sight as Myra passed—lay warped alongside the wall, with her fore-yard braced aslant to avoid chafing the roof of Mr. Benny's office, and her mainmast and standing rigging all but entirely hiding Mr. Benny's quay-door, the approach to which she completely obstructed. A little above her forestay a small window, uncurtained and brightly lit, broke the long stretch of featureless black wall. This was the window of Mr. Benny's inner office, and within, as she checked her way,

catching at the gunwale of one among the tethered boats, Myra could see the upper half of a hanging lamp and the shadow of its reflector on the smoky ceiling.

Mr. Benny would be seated under that lamp, no doubt. But how could she reach him?

The *One-and-All* lay head-to-stream, and so deep in the water that the tide all but washed her bulwarks, still grey with the dust of china-stone as she had come from her loading. Nowadays no British ship so scandalously overladen would be allowed to put to sea; but the Plimsoll-mark had not yet been invented to save seamen from their employers.

She lay so low that Myra, peering into the darkness, could almost see across decks to the farther bulwarks; and the decks were deserted. She mounted no riding-lamp, and no glimmer of light showed from hatchway, deckhouse, or galley.

Minutes passed, and, as still no sign of life appeared on board, Myra grew bolder and pushed across for a nearer view. Yes; the deck was deserted, and only the deck intervened between her and Mr. Benny's quay-door, by the sill of which the tide ran lapping and sucking at the crevices of the wall. She hardened her heart. Even if her footstep gave the alarm below, she could dash across and through the doorway before being seized or even detected. She laid both

hands on the clay-dusted bulwarks and hoisted herself gently. The boat—she had done with it—slipped away noiselessly from under her and away into darkness.

She had meant to clear the ship with a rush; but as her feet touched the deck her courage failed her, and she tiptoed forward stealthily, gaining the shadow of the deckhouse and pausing there.

And there, in the act of crouching to spring across the few remaining yards, she drew back, crouching lower yet; for, noiseless as she, the dark form of a man had stepped forward and framed itself in the grey glimmering doorway.

For an instant she made sure that he was about to step on board. But many seconds passed, and still he waited there—as it seemed to her, in the attitude of a man listening; though to what he listened she could not guess. She herself heard no sound but the lapping of the tide.

By and by, gripping the ladder-rail and setting one foot against the *One-and-All's* bulwarks to steady himself, the man leaned outboard and sideways until a faint edge of light from the office window fell on his upturned face.

It was the face of her uncle.

Fascinated by terror, following his gaze—by in-

stinct seeking for help, if any might be found—Myra lifted her face to the window. That too was darkened for the instant by a man's form; and as he crossed the room to the chair beside the desk, she recognised Tom Trevarthen.

CHAPTER XXIII

HESTER WRITES A LOVE-LETTER

Mr. Salt must have been preaching Hester's talent at large among seamen of the port, for when she returned from her interview with Sir George Mr. Benny met her at the kitchen door with news that no less than six sailors awaited her in the office, and that two or three had been patiently expecting her for an hour at least.

"'Tis a great tax on you, my dear, and I tried to reason wi' them; but they wouldn't take 'No' for an answer. What's more, when I retire from the business I shan't be honestly able to sell you the good-will of it, for they won't have my services at any price."

Hester laughed. "You won't even get me to bid," she assured him. "We shall soon be too busy for letter-writing, and must close the office; but to-night I suppose we cannot disappoint them."

So, with a sigh of resignation and an envious glance at the cosy fire, she turned and stepped briskly

down the courtyard to the office. There, as Mr. Benny had promised, she found six expectant mariners, and for an hour wrote busily, rapidly. Either she was growing cleverer at the business, or her talk with Sir George had keyed her to this happy pitch. She felt—it happens sometimes, if rarely, to most of us—in tune with all the world; and in those illuminated hours we feel as if our fellow-creatures could bring us no secret too obscure for our understanding, no trouble hopeless of our help. "The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." Hester found herself divining without effort what her clients wished her to write, and as easily translating the inarticulate message into words. It was superfluous for them to thank her as they did; her own inner voice told her she had done well.

At length they were gone, and she followed them so far as the outer office, to rake out the fire and tidy up for the night. As she stooped over the stove she was startled by a noise from the inner room—a noise as of someone moving the window-sash. But how could this be? Perhaps the sash-cord had parted, letting the pane slip down with a run—

It did not occur to her, though startled for the moment, to be afraid, or even to suspect any cause for fear. Her mind was still busy with this practical

explanation when she opened the door and her eyes fell on Tom Trevarthen.

His back was turned towards her as he closed the window by which he had just entered; but he faced about with a smile, ignoring the alarm in her face and the hand she put out against the door-jamb for support.

"Good-evenin', miss! You'll excuse my coming by the shortest way"—

"But—but *how* did you come?" she gasped.

He laughed. "Easy enough: I swung myself up by the schooner's fore-stay. Eh? Didn't you know the *One-and-All's* moored here just underneath? Then I must ha' given you a rare fright."

"Yes," said Hester, slowly getting back her composure, "you certainly frightened me; and I call it a very silly trick."

She said it with a sudden vehemence which surprised herself. It brought the colour back to her face, too. The young sailor stared at her.

"Well," he said admiringly, "you have a temper! But there's times when *you* make mistakes, I reckon."

She supposed him to allude to her unhappy intrusion upon the tattooing. Her colour deepened to a hot and lively red, and between shame and scorn she turned and walked from him into the outer office.

"Nay, now!" He followed her, suppliant. "Nay, now!" he repeated, as one might coax a child. "Simme I can't open my mouth 'ithout angering you, Miss Marvin; an' yet, ignorant as I be, 'tis plain to me you don't mean no hurt."

Now Hester had meant to walk straight out of the office and leave him. It would be hard to say precisely on what second thought she checked herself and, picking up the poker, sedulously resumed her raking-out of the stove. Partly, no doubt, she repented of having taken offence when he meant none. He had been innocent, and her suspicion of him recoiled back in self-contempt. It was a relief to hear him in turn accusing her unjustly. It gave her fresh ground, on which she really could defend herself.

"Hurt?" she echoed half defiantly, stooping and raking at the cinders.

"Why, of course you hurt," he insisted. "'Tis so queer to me you can't see it. Just reckon up all the harm this Rosewarne have a-done and is doing: Mother Butson's school closed, and the poor soul bedridden with rheumatics, all through being forced to seek field-work, at her time o' life and in this autumn's weather! My old mother driven into a charity-house. Nicky Vro dead in Bodmin gaol. Where was the fair play? Master Clem, I hear, parted

from his sister and packed off this very day to a home in London—lucky if 'tis better 'n a gaol"—

"Do you accuse *me* of all these wrongs?"

"No, I don't. But in most of 'em you've been mixed up, and in all of 'em you might have used power over the man. Where have you put in an oar except to make matters worse?"

It was on her lips to tell him that she had resigned the teachership; but she forebore.

"Do you know," she answered quietly, "that half-truths may be worse than lies, and a charge which is half-true the most cruelly unjust? We will agree that I have done more harm here than good. But do you accuse me of doing it wilfully, selfishly?"

"That's where I can't make you out," he said. "I can't even make out your doing wrong at all. Thinks I sometimes, 'Tis all a mistake. Go, look at her face, all made for goodness if ever a face was; try her once more, an' you'll be sorry for thinkin' ill of her.' That's the way of it. But then I come and find you mixed up in this miserable business, and all that's kind in you seems to harden, and all that's straight to run crooked. There's times I think you couldn't do wrong if you weren't so sure of doing right; and there's times, when I hear of your being kind to the school-children, I think it must be some curst ill-luck of my own that brings us always ath'art-hawse."

Beneath the lamplight his eyes searched hers appealingly, as a child's might; yet Hester wondered rather at the note of manliness in his voice—a new note to her, but an assured one. Whatever the cause, Tom Trevarthen was a lad no longer.

"Why should you suppose," she asked, "that I have power over Mr. Rosewarne?"

"Haven't you?"

The simple question confounded her, and she blushed again, as one detected in an untruth. It was as Tom said; some perverse fate impelled her at every turn to show at her worst before him.

"Good Lord!" he said slowly, watching her face. "You don't tell me you're going to marry him!"

She should have obeyed her first impulse and said "No" hotly. The word was on her lips when a second wave of indignation swelled within her and swept over the first, drowning it, and, with it, her speech. What right had he to question her, or what concern with her affairs? She threw back her head proudly, to look him in the face and ask him this. But he had turned from her.

His disgust angered her, and once more she changed her impulse for the worse.

"It seems," said she contemptuously, "that you reserve the right of making terms with Mr. Rosewarne."

He turned at the door of the inner office and regarded her for a moment with a dark frown.

"What do you mean by that?" His voice betrayed the strain on his self-command.

"Mr. Rosewarne owns the *One-and-All*, does he not? If, after what has happened, you accept his wages, you might well be a little less censorious of other folks' conduct."

If the shaft hit, he made no sign for the moment. "I reckon," he answered, with queer deliberateness, "your knowledge of ships and shipowners don't amount to much, else you wouldn't talk of Rosewarne's doing me a favour." He paused and laughed, not aloud but grimly. "The *One-and-All's* insured, Miss Marvin, and pretty heavily over her value. I'd take it as a kindness if you found someone fool enough to insure *me* for a trip in her."

"I don't understand."

"No, I reckon you don't. They finished loading her last night, and we moored her out in the channel, ready for the tug this morning. Before midnight she was leaking there like a basket, and by seven this morning she was leaking worse than a five-barred gate. The tug had just time to pluck us alongside here, or she'd have sunk at her moorings; and when we'd warped her steady and the tide left her, the water poured out of a hole I could shove my hand

through—not the seams, mark you, though they leak bad enough—but a hole where the china-stone had fairly knocked her open; and the timber all round it as rotten as cheese. All day, between tides, they've been sheathing it over, and packing the worst places in her seams; and to-night the crew, being all Troy men, are taking one more sleep ashore than they bargained for. They want it, too, after their spell at the pumps."

"Then why are you left on board?"

"Mainly because I've no home to go to; and somebody must act night-watchman. The skipper himself has bustled ashore with the rest. I reckon this morning's work scared him a bit, hand-in-glove though he is with Rosewarne; but he must be recovering, because just before stepping off he warned me against putting up the riding-light. There's no chance of anyone fouling us where we lie, and we can save two-penn'orth of oil."

"But you don't tell me Mr. Rosewarne sends his ships to sea, knowing them to be rotten?"

He hunched his shoulders. "Maybe he does; maybe he don't. It don't matter to me, the man's going to hell or not. But you seem to think I take his wages as a favour."

"Then why do you take them at all, at such a risk?"

"Because," he burst out, "you've come here and driven my mother to an almshouse, and I must earn money to get her out of it. If I'd a-known you was coming here with your education, I'd have picked up some of it and been prepared for you. A mate's certificate doesn't mean much in these days. Men like Rosewarne want a skipper who'll earn insurance-money and save oil. Still, I could have tried. But, like a fool, I was young and in a good berth, and let my chances slip; and then you came along and spoilt all."

"Did you seek me out to-night to tell me this?" she steadied herself to ask.

He lowered his eyes. "I want you to write a letter for me," he said, and added, after a pause, "That's what comes of wanting education."

Another and a very awkward pause followed. This discovery of his illiteracy shocked and hurt her inexpressibly. She could not even say why. Good sense warned her even in the instant of disappointment that a man might not know how to read or write and yet be none the less a good man and trustworthy. And even though the prejudice of her calling made her treat the defect too seriously, why in Tom Trevarthen should that shock her which in other seamen she took as a matter of course?

Yet in her shame for him she could lift her eyes; and he still kept his lowered upon the floor.

"To whom do you want me to write?" she asked.

"It's to a girl," he answered doggedly; and the words seemed to call up a dark flush in his face, which a moment before had been unwontedly pale—though this she did not perceive.

"A girl?"

"That's so; a girl, miss, if you don't mind—a girl as it happens I'm fond of."

"A love-letter? Is that what you mean?"

"If you don't mind, Miss Marvin?"

"Why on earth should I mind?" she asked, with a heat unintelligible to herself as to him.

A suspicion crossed her mind that the young woman might not be over-respectable; but she dismissed it. If the message were such as she could indite, she had no warrant to inquire further; and yet, "Is it quite fair to her?" she added.

The question plainly confused him. "Fair, miss?"

"You told me a minute ago that you found it hard to earn money for your mother; and now it seems you think of marrying."

"No, miss," said he simply; "I can't think of it at all. And that's partly what I want to tell her."

Hester frowned. "It's queer you should come

to me, whom you accuse of interfering to your harm. If I am guilty on other counts, I am guilty too of coming between you and this young woman."

He smiled faintly. "And that's true in a way," he allowed; "but you'll see I don't bear malice. The letter'll prove that, if so be you'll kindly write it for me."

He said it appealingly, with his hand on the door-handle. She bent her head in consent. Flinging the door open, he stood aside to let her pass.

It was a moment later as he crossed over to the client's chair that Myra caught sight of him from the schooner's deck. The child cowered back into the shadow of the deck-house, her eyes intent again on the listener leaning out from the quay-door. He could not even see what she had seen; and if Tom was in talk with anyone inside her own ears caught no sound of it. Nevertheless her uncle's attitude left no room to doubt that he was playing the spy, and trying, at least, to listen.

"What name?" asked Hester, dipping her pen.

"What name? Eh, to be sure"— Tom Trevarthen hesitated for a moment. "Put down Harriet Sands." She glanced up, and he nodded. "Yes, that'll do—Harriet Sands, of Runcorn."

"She must have some nearer address than that. Runcorn is a large town, is it not?"

He pondered, or seemed to ponder. "Then we'll put down 'Sailors' Return Inn, Quay Street, Runcorn.' That'll find her, as likely as anywhere."

Hester wrote the address and glanced up inquiringly; but his eyes were fastened on the desk where her hand rested, and on the virgin sheet of notepaper placed ready for use.

"A public-house? It wanted only that!" she told herself. Aloud she said, "'My dearest Harriet'—Is that how you begin?"

He appeared to consider this slowly. "I suppose so," he answered at length, with a shade of disappointment in his voice.

"And next, I suppose, you say, 'This comes hoping to find you well as it leaves me at present.'"

"Don't 'ee—don't 'ee, co!" he implored her almost with a cry of pain; and then, scarcely giving her time to be ashamed of her levity, he broke out, "They tell me you can guess a man's thoughts and write 'em down a'most before he speaks. Why won't you guess 'em for me? Write to her that when we parted she was unkind; but be she unkind for ever and ever, in my thoughts she will be the best woman in the world. Tell her that whatever she may do amiss, in my eyes she'll last on as the angel God A'mighty

meant her to be, and all because I love her and can't help it. Say that to her, and say that there's degrees between us never to be crossed, and I know it, and have never a hope to win level with her; but this once I will speak and be silent all the rest o' my days. Tell her that there's bars between us, but the only real one is her own self; that for nothing would she be beyond my reach but for being the woman she is."

Hester laid down the pen and looked up at him with eyes at once dim and shining.

"I cannot write this," she said, her lips stammering on the words. "I am not worthy—I laughed at you."

"Tell her," he went on, "that I'm a common seaman, earnin' two pound a month, with no book-learning and no hopes to rise; tell her that I've an old mother to keep—that for years to come there's no chance of my marryin'; and then tell her I'm glad of it, for it keeps me free to think only of her. Write all that down, Miss Marvin."

"I cannot," she protested.

Very gently but firmly he laid a brown, strong hand over hers as it rested on the letter. In a second he withdrew it, but in that second she felt herself mastered, commanded. She took up the pen and wrote.

"I have used your own words and none of mine,"

she said, when she had finished. "Shall I read them over to you?"

"No." He took the letter, folded it, and placed it in the envelope she handed him. "Why didn't you put it into better words?" he asked.

"Because I could not. Trust a woman to know what a woman likes. If I were this—this Harriet"— Her voice faltered and came to a halt.

"Yes?" He waited for her to continue.

"Why, then, that letter would make me a proud woman."

"Though it came from a common sailor?"

"She would not think first of that. She would be proud to be so loved."

"Thank you," said he slowly, and, drawing a shilling from his pocket, laid it on the desk. "Good-night and good-bye, Miss Marvin."

He moved to the window and flung up the sash. Seated astride the ledge, he looked back at her with a smile which seemed to say, "At last we are friends!" The next moment he had reached out a hand, caught hold of the *One-and-All's* forestay, and swung himself out into the darkness.

Hester, standing alone in the little office, heard a soft sliding sound which puzzled her, followed by the light thud of his feet as he dropped upon deck. She leaned out for a moment before closing the win-

dow. All was silent below, save for the lap of the tide between the schooner and the quay-wall.

As Tom Trevarthen opened the window and leaned out to grasp the forestay, Myra, still cowering by the deck-house, saw her uncle swing himself hurriedly back into the shadow of the quay-door. She too retreated a pace; and with that, her foot striking against the low coaming of an open hatchway, with a clutch at air she pitched backward and down into the vessel's hold.

She did not fall far, the *One-and-All* being loaded to within a foot or two of the hatches. Her tumble sent her sprawling upon a heap of loose china-clay. She felt it sliding under her and herself sliding with it, softly, down into darkness. She was bruised. She had wrenched her shoulder terribly, but she clenched her teeth and kept back the cry she had all but uttered.

The sliding ceased, and she tried to raise herself on an elbow out of the choking smother of clay-dust. The effort sent a stab of pain through her, exquisite, excruciating. She dropped forward upon her face, and there in the darkness she fainted.

Hester, having closed the window, put out the lights quietly, pausing in the outer office for a glance at the raked-out stove. Outside, as she locked the

door behind her, she paused again at the head of the step for an upward look at the sky, where, beyond the clouds, a small star or two twinkled in the dark square of Pegasus. She never knew how close in that instant she stood to death. Within six paces of her crouched a man made desperate by the worst of terrors—terror of himself; and maddened by the worst of all provocatives—jealousy.

He had come to her on a forlorn hope, believing that she only—if any helper in the world—could be his salvation from the devil within him. Not in cruelty, but in fear—which can be crueller than cruelty itself—he had packed off the helpless blind boy beyond his reach. He had promised himself that by dismissing the temptation he could lay the devil at a stroke and finally. On his way back from the station he had heard whispered within him the horrible truth: that he was a lost man, without self-control.

He had sought her merely by the instinct of self-preservation. She had cowed and mastered him once. In awful consciousness of his infirmity he craved only to be mastered again, to be soothed, quieted. He nodded to the men and women he passed in the streets. They saw nothing amiss with him—nothing more than his habitual straight-lipped visage and ill-fitting clothes.

He had dogged her to the office and listened outside for one, two, three hours. In the end, as he believed, he had caught her at tryst with his worst enemy—with the man who had knocked him down and humiliated him. Yet in his instant need he hated Tom Trevarthen less as a rival in love, less from remembered humiliation, than as a robber of the sole plank which might have saved him from drowning.

So long had the pair been closeted together that a saner jealousy might have suggested more evil suspicions. His jealousy passed these by as of no account. He could think only of his need and its foiled chance: his need was more urgent than any love. He had come for help, and found her colloguing with his enemy.

In his abject rage he could easily have done her violence and as easily have run forward and cried her pity. Between the two impulses he crouched irresolute and let her pass.

Hester came down the steps slowly, passed within a yard of him, and as slowly went up the dark courtyard. For the last time she paused, with her hand on Mr. Benny's door-latch; and this was what she said there to herself, silently—

"But why Harriet?—of all the hateful names!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RESCUE

"STYLE," said Mr. Joshua Benny, "has been defined as a gift of saying anything, of striking any note in the scale of human feelings, without impropriety. We cannot all have distinction, Mr. Parker—what I may call the *je ne sais quoi*"—

Mr. Joshua put this with a fine modesty, the distinction of his own style being proverbial—in Spendilove's Press Supply Bureau at any rate. He might have added with a wave of the hand, "You see to what it has advanced me!" for whereas the rest of Spendilove's literary men toiled in two gangs, one on either side of a long high-pitched desk, and wrote slashing leaders for the provincial press, Mr. Joshua exercised his lightness of touch upon "picturesque middles" in a sort of loose-box partitioned off from the main office by screens of opaque glass. This den—he spoke of it as his "scriptorium"—had a window looking out upon an elevated railway, along which the trains of the London, Chatham, and Dover line banged and

rattled all day long. For Spendilove's (as it was called by its familiars) inhabited the second floor of a building close to the foot of Ludgate Hill. The noise no longer disturbed Mr. Joshua, except when an engine halted just outside to blow off steam.

Mr. Joshua leaned back in his writing-chair, tapped a galley proof with admonitory forefinger, and gazed over his spectacles upon Mr. Parker—a weedy youth with a complexion suggestive of uncooked pastry.

"We cannot all have distinction, Mr. Parker, nor can it be acquired by effort. Vigour we may cultivate, and clearness we must; it is essential. On a level with these I should place propriety. Propriety teaches us to regulate our speech by the occasion; to be incisive at times and at times urbane; to adapt the 'how' to the 'when,' as I might put it. I do not think—I really do not think—that Christmas Eve is a happily chosen moment for calling Mr. Disraeli 'a Jew adventurer.'"

"Mr. Makins, sir, who wrote yesterday's Liberal leader for the syndicate, wound up by saying the time had gone by for mincing our opinion of the front Opposition Bench. He warned me last night, when I took over his job, to pitch it strong. He had it on good authority that the constituencies have been a good deal shaken by Mr. Gladstone's Army Purchase

coup, and some straight talk is needed to pull them together, in the eastern counties especially."

"You are young to the work, Mr. Parker. You may depend upon it—you may take it from me—that Spendilove's will not fail in straight talking, on either side of the question. But we must observe what our Gallic neighbours term *les convenances*. By the way, has Makins gone off for the holidays?"

"He was to have gone off last night, sir; but he turned up this morning to write Sam Collins's 'Tory Squire' column for the *Northern Guardian*, and a syndicate-middle on 'Christmas Cheer in the Good Old Times.' Collins sent him a wire late last night; his wife is down with pneumonia."

"Tut, tut—send him to me. A good-hearted fellow, Makins! Tell him I've a dozen old articles that will fix him up with 'Christmas Cheer' in less than twenty minutes. I keep them indexed. And if he wants it illustrated I can look him out a dozen blocks to take his choice from—'Bringing in the Boar's Head,' and that sort of thing."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but before I send him there's a party of four in the lower office waiting to see you—one of them a child—and seafaring folk by their talk. They walked in while I was sitting alone there, finishing off my article, and not a word would they tell of their business but that they must

speak to you in private. It's my belief they've come straight off a wreck, and with a paragraph at least."

"Seafaring folk, do you say?" It was a cherished hope of Mr. Joshua Benny's that one of these days Spendilove's would attract private information to its door, and not confine itself to decorating so much of the world's news as had already become common property.

"They asked for you, sir, as 'Mr. Joshua Benny, the great writer.'"

"Dear me, I hope you have not kept them waiting long? Show them up, please; and—here, wait a moment—on your way you can take Makins an armful of my commonplace books—eighteen sixty-three to seven; that will do. Tell him to look through the indexes himself; he'll find what he wants under 'Yule.'"

If Mr. Joshua's visitors had come, as Mr. Parker surmised, straight off a wreck, the first to file into his office had assuredly salved from calamity a wonderful headgear. This was Mrs. Purchase, in a bonnet crowned with a bunch of glass grapes; and by the hand she led Myra, who carried one arm in a sling. The child's features were pinched and pale, and her eyes unnaturally bright. Behind followed Mr. Purchase and Tom Trevarthen, holding their

caps, and looking around uneasily for a mat to wipe their shoes on.

No such shyness troubled Mrs. Purchase. "Good-morning!" she began briskly, holding out a hand.

Mr. Joshua took it helplessly, his eyes for the moment riveted on her bonnet. It bore no traces of exposure to sea-water, and he transferred his scrutiny to the child.

"You don't remember me," pursued Mrs. Purchase cheerfully. "But I'd have picked you out from a thousand, though I han't seen you since you was *so* high." She spread out a palm some three feet or less from the floor. "I'm Hannah Purchase, that used to be Hannah Rosewarne, daughter of John Rosewarne of Hall. You know now who I be, I reckon; and this here's my niece, and that there's my husband. The young man in the doorway ain't no relation; but he comes from Hall too. He's Sal Trevarthen's son. You remember Sal Trevarthen?"

"Ah, yes—yes, to be sure. Delighted to see you, madam—delighted," stammered Mr. Joshua, who, however, as yet showed signs only of bewilderment. "And you wish to see me"—

"Wish to see you? Man alive, we've been hunting all Fleet Street for you! Talk about rabbit warrens! Well, when 'tis over 'tis over, as Joan said by her wedding, and here we be at last."

She paused and looked around.

"Place wants dusting," she observed. "Never married, did 'ee? I reckoned I'd never heard of your marrying. Your brother now has eleven of 'em—children, I mean; and yet you feature him wonderful, though fuller in the face. But the Lord's ways be past finding out."

"Amen," said her husband, paying his customary tribute to a scriptural quotation, and added, "They don't keep over many chairs in this office." He addressed this observation to Tom Trevarthen with an impartial air as one announcing a scientific discovery.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Purchase, seating herself in a chair which Mr. Joshua made haste to provide. "You will oblige me by paying no attention to 'Siah. Well, as I was saying, it's a mercy the Lord has made you the man you be; for we're in want of your help, all four of us."

"If I can be of service"— Mr. Joshua murmured.

"I remember," said Mrs. Purchase, arranging her bonnet with an air of one coming to business, "when I was a little girl reading in a history book about a man called Bucket, who fell in love with a black woman in foreign parts; or she may have been brown or whitey-brown for all I can remember at this distance of time. But, anyway, he was parted from

her, and came home to London here, and all she knew about him was his name 'Bucket.' Well, she took ship and kept on saying 'Bucket' till somewhere in London she found him. And if that happened once, it ought to be able to happen again, especially in these days of newspapers, and when we've got the address."

Mrs. Purchase produced a crumpled slip of paper, and handed it to Mr. Joshua, who adjusted his spectacles.

"An institution for the blind, and near Bexley, apparently." He glanced up in mild interrogation.

"What sort of place is it? Nice goings-on there I'll promise you; and if 'tis better than penal servitude I shall be surprised, seeing that Sam Rosewarne is hand-in-glove with it. Never you mind, my dear," she added, turning to Myra, who shivered, holding her hand. "We'll get him out of it, or there's no law in England."

Mr. Joshua, still hopelessly fogged, wheeled his chair round to the bookcase behind him, and took down a Directory, with a smaller reference work upon Hospitals and Charitable Institutions.

"H'm," said he, coming to a halt as he turned the pages; "here it is—'Huntingdon Orphanage for the Blind'—'mainly supported by voluntary contributions'—address, 52 Conyers Road, Bexley, S.E.

It seems to have an influential list of patrons, mainly Dissenters, as I should guess."

"It may keep 'em," said Mrs. Purchase, "so long as you get that poor child out of it."

"My dear lady, if you would be more explicit!" cried Mr. Joshua. "To what poor child do you allude? And what is the help you ask of me?"

"If the worst comes to the worst, you can denounce 'em." Mrs. Purchase untied her bonnet strings, and then slowly crossed her legs—an unfeminine habit of hers. "'Tis like a story out of a book," she pursued. "This very morning as we was moored a little above Deptford in the *Virtuous Lady*—that's my husband's ship—and me making the coffee for breakfast as usual, comes off a boy with a telegram, saying, 'Meet me and Miss Myra by the foot of the Monument. Most important.—Tom Trevarthen.' You might have knocked me down with a feather, and even then I couldn't make head nor tail of it."

To this extent her experience seemed to be repeating itself in Mr. Joshua.

"For to begin with," she went on, "how did I know that Tom Trevarthen was in London? let alone that last time we met we parted in anger. But he'd picked us out among the shipping as he was towed up last night in the *One-and-All* to anchor in the

Pool. And I defy anyone to guess that he'd got Myra here on board, who's my own niece by a second marriage, and shipped herself as a stowaway, but was hurt by a fall down the hold, and might have lain there and starved to death, poor child—and all for love of her brother that his uncle had shipped off to a blind orphanage. But there's a providence, Mr. Benny, that watches over children—and you may lay to that." Mrs. Purchase took breath. "Well, naturally, as you may guess, my first thought was to set it down for a hoax, though not in the best of taste. But with Myra's name staring me in the face in the telegram, and blood being thicker than water, on second thoughts I told 'Siah to put on his best clothes and come to the Monument with me, not saying more for fear of upsetting him. 'Why the Monument?' says 'Siah. 'Why not?' says I; 'it was put up against the Roman Catholics.' So that determined him; and I wanted company, for in London you can't be too careful. Sure enough, when we got to it, there was Tom waiting, with this poor child holding his hand; and then the whole story came out. 'But what's to be done?' I said, for my very flesh rebelled against such cruelty to the child, let alone that he was flogged black and blue at home. And then Tom Trevarthen had a thought even cleverer than his telegram. 'Peter Benny,' says he, 'has a brother

here in London connected with the press; the press can do anything, and by Peter's account his brother can do anything with the press. If we can only find him, our job's as good as done.' So we hailed a cab, and told the man to drive us to the *Shipping Gazette.* But I reckon we must have started someways at the wrong end, for the *Shipping Gazette* passed us on to a place called the *Times,* where they kept us waiting forty minutes, and then said they didn't know you, but advised us to try the *Cheshire Cheese,* where I asked for the editor, and this caused another delay. But a gentleman there drinkin' whisky-and-water said he'd heard of you in connection with the *Christian Herald,* and the *Christian Herald* gave us over to a policeman, who brought us here; and now the question is, what would you advise?"

"I should advise," said Mr. Joshua, pulling out his watch, "your coming off to lunch with me."

"You're a practical man, I see," said Mrs. Purchase, "and I say again 'tis a pity you never married. We'll leave the whole affair in your hands."

In his published writings Mr. Joshua had often descanted on the power of the Fourth Estate; and in his addresses to young aspirants he ever laid stress on the crucial faculty of sifting out the essentials, whether in narrative or argument, from whatever

was of secondary importance, circumstantial, or irrelevant. The confidence and accuracy with which Mrs. Purchase challenged him to put his faith and his method into instant practice, staggered him not a little. He felt himself hit, so to speak, with both barrels.

It will be allowed that he rose to the test admirably. Under an arch of the railway bridge at the foot of Ludgate Hill there is a restaurant where you may eat and drink and hear all the while the trains rumbling over your head. To this he led the party; and while Mrs. Purchase talked, he sifted out with professional skill the main points of her story, and discovered what she required of him. To be sure, the Power of the Press remained to be vindicated, and as yet he was far from seeing his way clear. The woman required him to storm the doors of an orphanage and rescue without parley the body of a child consigned to it by a legal guardian (which was absurd); or if not instantly successful, to cow the officials with threats of exposure (which again was absurd; since, for aught he knew, the institution thoroughly deserved the subscriptions of the public).

Yet while his own heart sank, the confidence of his guests, and their belief in him, sensibly increased. He had chosen this particular restaurant not de-

liberately, but with the instinct of a born journalist; for it is the first secret of journalism to appear to be moving at high speed even when standing absolutely still, and here in the purlieus of the clanging station, amid the thunder of trains and the rush of hundreds of feet to bookstalls and ticket-offices; here where the clash of knives and forks and plates mingled with the rumble of cabs and the calls of porters and newspaper boys, the impression of activity was irresistible. Here, as Mrs. Purchase had declared, was a practical man. Their business promised well with all these wheels in motion.

"And now," said Mr. Joshua, as he paid the bill, "we will take the train for Bexley, and see."

In his own heart he hoped that a visit to the Orphanage would satisfy them. He would seek the governor or matron in charge; they would be allowed an interview with the child, and finding him in good hands, contented and well cared for, would shed some natural tears perhaps, but return cheerful and reassured. This was as much as Mr. Joshua dared to hope. While piecing together Mrs. Purchase's narrative he had been sincerely touched—good man—by some of its details; particularly when Tom Trevarthen struck in and related how on the second night out of port he had been kept awake by a faint persistent knocking on the bulkhead separating the fo'c'sle from

the schooner's hold; how he had drawn his shipmates' attention to it; how he had persuaded the skipper to uncover one of the hatches; and how he had descended with a lantern and found poor Myra half dead with sickness and hunger. Mr. Joshua did not understand children; but he had a good heart nevertheless. He eyed Myra from time to time with a sympathetic curiosity, shy and almost timid, as the train swung out over the points, and the child, nestling down in a corner by the window, gazed out across the mirky suburbs with eyes which, devouring the distance, regarded him not at all.

The child did not doubt. She followed with the others as he shepherded them through the station to the train which came, as if to his call, from among half a dozen others, all ready at hand. He was a magician, benevolent as any in her fairy-tales, and when all was over she would thank him, even with tears. But just now she could think only of Clem and her journey's end. Clem!—Clem!—the train clanked out his name over and over. Would these lines of dingy houses, factories, smoky gardens, rubbish-heaps, broken palings, never come to an end?

They trailed past the window in meaningless procession; empty phenomena, and as dull as they were empty. But the glorious golden certainty lay beyond. "Just look to the poor mite!" whispered Mrs. Pur-

chase, nudging her husband. Myra's ears caught the words distinctly, but Myra did not hear.

Bexley at last! with two or three cabs outside the station. Later on she remembered them, and the colour of the horse in the one which Mr. Joshua chose, and the driver's face, and Mr. Joshua leaning out of the window and shouting directions. She remembered also the mist on the glass window of the four-wheeler, and the foggy houses, detached and semi-detached, looming behind their roadway walls and naked fences of privet; the clapping sound of the horse, trotting with one loose shoe; Aunt Hannah's clutch at her arm as they drew up in the early dusk before a gate with a clump of evergreens on either side; and a glimpse of a tall red-brick building as Mr. Joshua opened the door and alighted.

He was gone, and they sat in the cab and waited for him a tedious while. She did not understand. Why should they wait now, with Clem so near at hand? But she was patient, not doubting at all of the result.

He came running back at length, and radiant—as though the issue had ever been in doubt! The cab moved through the gateway and halted before a low flight of steps, and everyone clambered out. The dusk had deepened, and she blinked as she stepped into a lighted hall. A tall man met them

there; whispered, or seemed to whisper, a moment with Mr. Joshua; and beckoned them to follow. They followed him, turning to the right, down a long corridor not so brightly lit as the hall had been. At the end he halted for a moment and gently opened a door.

They passed through it into what, for a moment, seemed to be total darkness. They stood, in fact, at the head of a tall platform of many steps, semicircular in shape, looking down upon a long hall, unlit as yet (for the blind need no lamps); and below, on the floor of the hall, ranged at their desks in the fading light, sat row upon row of children. The murmur of many voices rose from that shadowy throng, as Myra, shaking off Aunt Hannah's grasp, stepped forward to the edge of the platform with both arms extended, her hurt forgotten.

"Myra!"

The opening of the door could scarcely have been audible amid the murmur below. She herself had stretched out her arms, uttering no sound, not yet discerning him among the dim murmuring shadows. What telegraphy of love reached, and on the instant, that one child in the throng and fetched him to his feet, crying out her name? And he was blind. From the way he ran to her, heeding no obstacles, stumbling against desks, breaking his shins cruelly against the

steps of the platform as he stretched up both hands to her, all might see that he was blind. Yet he came, as she had known he would come.

"CLEM!"

They were in each other's arms, sobbing, laughing, crooning soft words together, but only these articulate—

"You knew me?"

"Yes, you have come—I knew you would come!"

"Now I ask you," said Aunt Hannah to the Matron, who, unobserved by the visitors, had followed them down the corridor, "I don't know you from Adam, ma'am, but I ask you, as a Christian woman, if you'd part them two lambs? And, if so, how?"

The Matron's answer went near to abashing her; for the Matron turned out to be not only a Christian woman, as challenged, but an extremely tender-hearted one.

"I like the child," she answered. "I like him so much that I'd be thankful if you could get him removed; for, to tell the truth, he's ailing here. We try to feed him well, and we try to make him happy; but he's losing flesh, and he's not happy. Indeed we are not tyrants, ma'am, and if it pleases you his sister shall stay with him overnight, and I promise to take care of her; but he came to us from

his legal guardian, and without leave we can't give him up."

It was at this point that inspiration came to Mr. Joshua.

"Why not a telegram?" he suggested. "As his aunt, ma'am, you might suggest a sea voyage for the child, and leave it to me to word it strongly."

"If I wasn't a married woman," said Mrs. Purchase, "I could openly bless the hour I made your acquaintance."

Between the despatch of Mr. Joshua's telegram and the receipt of his answer there was weary waiting for all but the two children. They, content in the moment's bliss, secure of the future, being reunited, neither asked nor doubted.

Yet they missed something—the glad, astounded surprise of their elders as Mr. Joshua, having taken the yellow envelope from Mrs. Purchase, whose courage failed her, broke it open, and read aloud, "*Leave child in your hands. Only do not bring him home.*"

It was a happy party that travelled back that night to Blackfriars; and Mr. Joshua, after shaking hands with everybody many times over, and promised to eat his Christmas dinner on board the *Virtuous Lady*, walked homeward to his solitary lodgings elate, treading the frosty pavement with an unaccustomed springiness of step. He had vindicated the Power of the Press.

CHAPTER XXV

BUT TOM CAN WRITE

"A LETTER for you, Mrs. Trevarthen!"

Spring had come. The flight and finding of Myra had long since ceased to be a nine days' wonder, and she and Clem and Tom Trevarthen—received back into favour, and in some danger of being petted by Mrs. Purchase, who had never been known to pet a seaman—were shipmates now on board the *Virtuous Lady*, and had passed for many weeks now beyond ken of the little port. A new schoolmistress reigned in Hester's stead, since Hester, with the New Year, had taken over the care of the Widows' Houses. In his counting-house at Hall Samuel Rosewarne sat day after day transacting his business without a clerk, speaking seldom, shunned by all—even by his own son; a man afraid of himself. Susannah declared that the house was like a tomb, and vowed regularly on Monday mornings to give "warning" at the next week-end. The villagers, accustomed to the Rosewarne tyranny for generations, had found it hard to believe in their release. Lady Killiow was little

more than a name to them, Rosewarne a very present steward and master of their lives; and at first, when Peter Benny engaged workmen to pull down Nicky Vro's cottage and erect a modest office on its site, they admired his temerity, but awoke each morning to fresh wonder that no thunderbolt from Hall had descended during the night and razed his work to the ground. The new ferryman had vanished too, paid off and discharged for flagrant drunkenness, and his place was taken by old Billy Daddo the Methodist—a change so comfortable and (when you come to think of it) a choice so happy, that the villagers, after the shock of surprise, could hardly believe they had not suggested it. If they did not quite forget Nicky and his sorrows—if in place of Nicky's pagan chatter they listened to Billy's earnest, gentle discourse, and might hardly cross to meal or market without being reminded of God—why, after all, the word of God was good hearing, and everyone ought to take an interest in it. Stop your ears for a moment, and you could almost believe 'twas Nicky come back to life again. Nobody could deny the man was cheerful and civil. He rowed a stroke, too, amazingly like Nicky's.

As for Rosewarne, in the revulsion of their fears they began to despise him. They had done better to pity him.

Across the water, in her lodging in the Widows'

Houses, Hester found work to be done which, to her surprise, kept her busier than she had ever been in her life before—so busy that the quiet quadrangle seemed to hold no room for news of the world without. She found that, if she were to satisfy her conscience in the service of these old women, she could seldom save more than an hour's leisure from the short spring days; and in that hour maybe Sir George would call with his plans, or she would put on her bonnet and walk down the hill for a call on the Bennys and a chat with Nuncey. But oftener it was Nuncey who came for a gossip; Nuncey having sold her cart and retired from business.

Spring had come. Within the almshouse quadrangle, around the leaden pump, the daffodils were in flower and the tulip buds swelling. A blast from the first of those golden trumpets could hardly have startled her more than did her first sight of it flaunting in the sun. It had stolen upon her like a thief.

"A letter for you, Mrs. Trevarthen!"

The postman, as he crossed the quadrangle to the Matron's door, glanced up and spied Mrs. Trevarthen bending over a wash-tub in the widows' gallery. He pulled a letter from his pocket and held it aloft gaily.

"I'll run up the steps with it if you can't reach."

"No need to trouble you, my dear, if you'll wait a moment."

Mrs. Trevarthen dried her hands in her coarse apron, leaned over the balustrade, and just contrived to reach the letter with her finger-tips. They were bleached with soap and warm water, and they trembled a little.

"'Tis from your son Tom, I reckon," said the postman, while she examined the envelope. "It's from Tom, I reckon. Foreign paper and the Quebec postmark."

"From Tom? O' course 'tis from Tom! Get along with 'ee do! What other man would be writing to me at my time o' life?"

The postman walked on, laughing. Mrs. Trevarthen stood for some while irresolute, holding the envelope between finger and thumb, and glancing from it to a closed door at the back of the gallery. A slant low sun-ray almost reached to the threshold, and was cut short there by the shadow of the gallery eaves.

"Best not disturb her, I s'pose," said the old woman, with a sigh. She laid the letter down, but very reluctantly, beside the wash-tub, and plunged both hands among the suds again. "Quebec!" The word recalled a silly old song of the sailors; she had heard her boy hum it again and again—

"Was you ever to Quebec,
Bonny lassie, bonny lassie?
Was you ever to Quebec,
Rousing timber over the deck"—

A door opened at the end of the gallery, and Hester came through.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Trevarthen!"

"'Mornin', my dear."

These two were friends now on the common ground of nursing Aunt Butson, who had been bedridden almost from the day of her admission to the almshouse, her gaunt frame twisted with dire rheumatics.

Hester, arriving to take up her duties and finding Mrs. Trevarthen outworn with nursing, had packed her off to rest and taken her place by the invalid's bedside. In this service she had been faithful ever since; and it was no light one, for affliction did not chasten Mrs. Butson's caustic tongue.

"Is she still sleeping?" Hester glanced at the door.

"Ay, ever since you left. Her pains have wore her out, belike. A terrible night! Why didn' you call me sooner?"

"You have a letter, I see."

Mrs. Trevarthen nodded, obviously embarrassed.

"Keeping it for *her*, I was," she explained. "She do dearly like to look my letters over. She gets none of her own, you see."

But Hester was not deceived, having observed (without appearing to detect it) Mrs. Trevarthen's difficulty with the written instructions on the medicine bottles.

"But she will not wake for some time, we'll hope; and you haven't even broken the seal! If you would like me to read it to you—it would save your eyes; and I am very discreet—really I am."

Mrs. Trevarthen hesitated. "My eyes be bad, sure enough," she said, weakening. "But you mustn't blame me if you come across a word or two you don't like."

"I shall remember no more of it than you choose," said Hester, slightly puzzled.

"My Tom han't ever said a word agen' you, and the odds are he'll say nothing now. Still, there's the chance, and you can't rightly blame him."

"Tom?" Hester's eyes opened wide.

"I know my own boy's writing, I should hope!" said Mrs. Trevarthen, with pardonable pride. "And good writing it is. Sally Butson says she never taught a boy whose hand did her more credit. But what's the matter? You'm as pale as a sheet almost!"

"I—I didn't know"— stammered Hester, and checked herself.

"You've been over-tiring yourself, and to-night you'll just go off to bed early and leave the nursing to me. What didn't you know? That Tom was a scholar? A handsome scholar he'd have been, but for going to sea early when his father died. I wonder sometimes if he worries over it and the chances he missed. But Quebec's the postmark; and that means he's right and safe, thank the Lord! I don't fret so long as he's aboard a well-found ship. 'Twas his signing aboard the *One-and-All*—'Rosewarne's coffin,' they call her—that nigh broke me. He didn' let me know till two nights afore he sailed. 'Beggars can't be choosers,' he said; and afterwards I found out from Peter Benny that he'd covered his poor body with tattoo marks—his body that I've a-washed hundreds o' times, and loved to feel his legs kickin' agen' me. Beautiful skin he had as a child; soft as satin the feel of it, and not a blemish anywhere. 'Tis hard to think of it criss-crossed with them nasty marks. But there! Thank the Lord God he's safe, this passage! Read me what he says, there's a kind soul; but you'll have to bear a child afore you know what I've a-been going through wi' that letter starin' me in the face."

Hester, resting a shoulder against one of the oaken

pillars of the gallery, where the sunshine touched her face with colour, broke the seal.

"Here is an enclosure—a post-office order for fifty shillings."

"God bless him! 'tis welcome; though I could have made shift at a pinch. Peter Benny manages these things for me," said Mrs. Trevarthen, folding it lengthwise and inserting it between the buttons of her bodice. What she meant was that Mr. Benny as a rule attested her mark and brought her the money from the post-office. But Hester, busy with her own thoughts, scarcely heard. Why had Tom Trevarthen pretended to her that he could not write? Why had he trapped her into writing a letter for him—and to this Harriet, whoever she might be? She unfolded the letter and read, in bold, clear penmanship—

QUEBEC, 14*th February* 1872.

"MY DEAR MOTHER,—This is to enclose what I can, and to tell you we arrived yesterday after a fair passage, and dropped hook in the Basin below Quebec; all on board well and hearty, including Miss Myra and Master Clem. But between ourselves the old man won't last many more trips. His head is weakening, and Mrs. Purchase, though she won't own to it, is fairly worn with watching him. We hadn't scarcely cleared the Channel before we ran into dirty weather, with the wind W. to N.-W. and rising. We looked, of course, for the old man to shorten sail and send her along easy, he being noted for caution. But not a bit of it. The second day out he comes forward to me, that

stood cocking an eye aloft and waiting for him to speak, and says he, 'This is not at all what I expected, but the Lord will provide;' and with that he pulled out a Bible from his pocket and tapped it, looking at me very knowing, and so walked aft and shut himself up in his cabin. Not another glimpse did we get of him for thirty-six hours, and no message on earth could fetch him up or persuade him to let us take a stitch off her. As for old Hewitt, that has been mate of her these fifteen years, and forgotten all he ever knew, except to do what he's told, not a rag would he shift on his own responsibility. There she was, with a new foretop-sail never stretched before, and almost all her canvas less than two years old, playing the mischief with it all, let alone putting the ship in danger. At last, when she was fairly smothering herself and her top masts bending like whips, up he pops, Bible in hand, and says he, with a look aloft and around, like a man more hurt than angry, 'Heavenly Father, this won't do! This here's a pretty state of things, Heavenly Father!' When the boys had eased her down a bit—at the risk of their lives it was—and the old man had disappeared below again, Mrs. Purchase came crawling aft to me in the wheelhouse, wet as a drowned rat; and there we had a talk—very confidential, though 'twas mostly carried on by shouting. The upshot was, she couldn't trust the old man's head. In his best days he'd have threaded the *Virtuous Lady* through a needle, and was capable yet; but with this craze upon him he was just as capable of casting the ship away for the fun of it. As for Hewitt, we found out his quality in the fogs off the Banks, when the skipper struck work again and let the dead-reckoning go to glory, telling us to consider the lilies. Hewitt took it over, and in two days had worked us south of our course by eighty odd miles. By the Lord's

mercy, on the third day we could take our bearings, and so hauled up and fetch the Gulf; and here we are right and tight, and Mrs. Purchase gone ashore to ship a navigating officer for the passage home. But mates' certificates don't run cheap in these parts, as they do on Tower Hill, and the pilots tell me she'll be lucky if she gets what she wants for love or money.

"Dear mother, remember me to all the folks, and give my love to Granny Butson. Master Clem is putting on flesh wonderful, and I reckon the pair of them are in no hurry to get home to school.

"Talking of that, I would like to hear how the school gets along, and Miss Marvin"—

"Eh?" Mrs. Trevarthen interrupted. "Why, come to think of it, he's never heard of your coming to look after us, but reckons you'm still at the school-mistressing. And you standing there and reading out his very words! I call that a proper joke."

"—and that limb of ugliness, Rosewarne. But by the time this reaches you we shall be loaded and ready for sailing; so no news can I hear till I get home, and perhaps it is lucky. Good-bye now. If the world went right, it is not you would be living in the Widows' Houses, nor I that would be finding it hard to forgive folks; but as Nicky Vro used to say, 'Must thank the Lord, I reckon, that we be so well as we be.' No more at present from your loving son,

TOM."

"I don't understand the tail-end o' that," said Mrs. Trevarthen. "Would you mind reading it

over again, my dear?—Well, well, you needn't to flush up so, that he finds it hard to forgive folks. Meanin' you, d'ee think? He don't speak unkindly of any but Rosewarne; and I don't mind that I've heard news of that varmint for a month past. Have you?"

Hester did not answer—scarcely even heard. The hand in which she held the letter fell limp at her side as she stood gazing across the quadrangle facing the sun, but with a soft, new-born light in her eyes, that did not owe its kindling there. Why had he played this trick on her? She could not explain, and yet she understood. For her he had meant that letter—yes, she was sure of it! To her, as though for another, he had spoken those words—she remembered every one of them. He had not dared to speak directly. And he had made her write them down. Foolish boy that he was, he had been cunning. Did she forgive him? She could not help forgiving; but it was foolish—foolish!

She put on her bonnet that evening and walked down to see Nuncey and have a talk with her; not to confide her secret, but simply because her elate spirit craved for a talk.

Greatly to her disappointment, Nuncey was out; nor could Mrs. Benny tell where the girl had gone, unless (hazarding a guess) she had crossed the ferry to her father's fine new office, to discuss fittings and

furniture. Nuncey had dropped into the habit, since the days began to lengthen, of crossing the ferry after tea-time.

Hester decided to walk as far as the Passage Slip on the chance of meeting her. Somewhat to her surprise, as she passed Broad Quay she almost ran into Master Calvin Rosewarne, idling there with his hands in his pockets, and apparently at a loose end.

"Calvin! Why, whatever are you doing here, on this side of the water?"

The boy—he had not the manners to take off his cap—eyed her for a moment with an air half suspicious and half defiant. "That's telling," he answered darkly, and added, after a pause, "Were you looking for anyone?"

"I was hoping to meet Nuncey Benny. She has gone across to her father's new office—or so Mrs. Benny thinks."

The boy grinned. "She won't be coming this way just yet, and she's not at the new office. But I'll tell you where to find her, if you'll let me come along with you."

On their way to the ferry he looked up once or twice askance at her, as if half-minded to speak; but it was not until old Daddo had landed them on the farther shore that he seemed to find his tongue.

"Look here," he said abruptly, halting in the roadway, and regarding her from under lowering brows; "the last time you took me in lessons you told me to think less of myself and more of other people. Didn't you, now?"

"Well?" said Hester, preoccupied, dimly remembering that talk.

"Well, you seemed to forget your own teaching pretty easily when you walked out of Hall and left me there on the stream. Nice company you left me to, didn't you?"

"Your father"— began Hester lamely.

"We won't talk of Dad. He's altered—I don't know how. I can't get on with him, though he's the only person hereabouts that don't hate me; I'll give him *that* credit. But I ask you, wasn't it pretty rough on a chap to haul him over the coals for selfishness, and then march out and leave him without another thought? And that's what you did."

"I am sorry." Hester's conscience accused her, and she was contrite. The child must have found life desperately dull.

"I forgive you," said Master Calvin, magnanimously, and resumed his walk. "I forgive you on condition you'll do a small job for me. When Myra turns up again—and sooner or later she'll turn up—I want you to give her a message."

"Very well; but why not give it yourself?"

"She don't speak to me, you know," he answered, stooping to pick up a stone and bowl it down the hill. It scattered a trio of ducks, gathered a few yards below and cluttering with their bills in the village stream, and he laughed as they waddled off in panic. "That's how I'm left to amuse myself," he said after a moment apologetically, but again half defiantly. "You've to tell Myra," he went on, picking up another stone, eyeing for an aim, and dropping it, "that I like her pluck, but she needn't have been in such a hurry to teach the head of the family. Will you remember that?"

"I will, although I don't know what you mean by it."

"Never you mind, but take her that message; Myra will understand."

He stepped ahead a few paces, as if unwilling to be questioned further. They passed the gate of Hall. Beyond it, at the foot of the Jacob's Ladder leading up to Parc-an-Hal, he whispered to her to halt, climbed with great caution, and disappeared behind the hedge of the great meadow; but by and by he came stealing back and beckoned to her.

"It's all right," he whispered; "only step softly."

Keeping close alongside the lower hedge, he led

the way towards the great rick at the far corner of the field. As they drew close to it he caught her arm and pulled her aside, pointing to her shadow, which the level sun had all but thrown beyond the rick.

"But what is the meaning of it?"

The question was on her lips when her ear caught the note of a voice—Nuncey's voice—and these words, low, and yet distinct—

"At the call 'Attention!' the whole body and head must be held erect, the chin slightly dropped, chest well open, shoulders square to the front, eyes looking straight forward. The arms must hang easily, with fingers and thumbs straight, close to one another and touching the thighs; the feet turned out at right angles or nearly. Now, please—'Tention!"—(a pause)—"You break my heart, you do! Eyes, I said, looking *straight forward;* and the weight of the body ought to rest on the front part of the foot—not tilted back on your heels and looking like a china cat in a thunderstorm. Now try again, that's a dear!"

Hester gazed around wildly at Calvin, who was twisting himself in silent contortions of mirth.

"Take a peep!" he gasped. "She's courting Archelaus Libby, and teaching him to look like a man."

"You odious child!" Hester, ashamed of her

life to have been trapped into eavesdropping, and yet doubting her ears, strode past the edge of the rick and into full view.

Nuncey drew back with a cry.

"Hester Marvin!"

Hester's eyes travelled past her and rested on Archelaus. He, rigid at attention, caught and held there spellbound, merely rolled a pair of agonized eyes.

"Nuncey! Archelaus! What on earth are you two doing?"

"Learnin' him to be a Volunteer, be sure!" answered Nuncey, her face the colour of a peony. After an instant she dropped her eyes, her cheeks confessing the truth.

"But—but why?" Hester stared from one to the other.

"If he'd only be like other men!" protested Nuncey.

Hester ran to her with a happy laugh. "But you wouldn't wish him like other men!"

"I do, and I don't." Nuncey eluded her embrace, having caught the sound of ribald laughter on the other side of the rick. Darting around, she was in time to catch Master Calvin two cuffs, right and left, upon the ears. He broke for the gate and she pursued, but presently returned breathless.

"'Tis wonderful to me," she said, eyeing Archelaus critically and sternly, "how ever I come to listen to him. But he softened me by talking about *you*. He's a deal more clever than he seems, and I believe at this moment he likes you best."

"I don't!" said Archelaus firmly; "begging your pardon, Miss Marvin."

"I am sure you don't," laughed Hester.

"Well, anyway, I'll have to tell father now," said Nuncey; "for that imp of a boy will be putting it all round the parish."

But here Archelaus asserted himself. "That's my business," he said quietly. "It isn't any man's 'yes' or 'no' I'm afraid of, Miss Marvin, having stood up to *her*."

CHAPTER XXVI

MESSENGERS

In Cornwall, they say, the cuckoo brings a gale of wind with him; and of all gales in the year this is the one most dreaded by gardeners and cidermen, for it catches the fruit trees in the height of their blossoming season, and in its short rage wrecks a whole year's promise.

Such a gale overtook the *Virtuous Lady*, homeward bound, in mid-Atlantic. For two days and a night she ran before it; but this of course is a seaman's phrase, and actually, fast as the wind hurled her forward, she lagged back against it until she wallowed in its wake, and her crew gave thanks and crept below to their bunks, too dog-weary to put off their sodden clothes.

The gale passed on and struck our south-western coast, devastating the orchards of Cornwall and Devon and carpeting them with unborn fruit—*dulcis vitæ exsortes.* Amid this unthrifty waste and hard by, off Berry Head, the schooner *One-and-All* foundered and went down, not prematurely.

Foreseeing the end, her master had given orders to lower the whale-boat. The schooner might be apple-rotten, as her crew declared, but she carried a whale-boat which had inspired confidence for years and induced many a hesitating hand to sign articles; a seaworthy boat, to begin with, and by her owner's and master's care made as nearly unsinkable as might be, cork-fendered, fitted bow and stern with air tanks, well found in all her gear. Woe betide the seaman who abstracted an inch of rope from her to patch up the schooner's crazy rigging, or who left a life-belt lying loose around the deck or a rowlock unrestored to its due place after the weekly scrub-down!

The crew, then, launched the boat—half filling her in the process—and, tumbling in, pulled for the lee of the high land between Berry Head and Brixham. The master took the helm. He was steering without one backward look at the abandoned ship, when the oarsmen ceased pulling, all together, with a cry of dismay.

On the schooner's deck stood a child, waving his arms despairingly.

How he came there they could not tell, nor who he was. The master, not understanding their outcry, cursed and shouted to them to pull on. But already the starboard oars were holding water and the bowman bringing her around head-to-sea.

"Good Lord deliver us!"

The master carried a pair of binoculars slung in a leathern case about his shoulders inside his oilskin coat. They had been given to him by public subscription many years before, with a purse of gold, as a reward for saving life at sea. Since then he had forgotten in whisky-drinking and money-getting all the generous courage of his youth. His business for many years had been to play with human life for his own and his owner's profit, with no care but to keep on the right side of the law. The noble impulse which had earned him this testimonial was dead within him; to recover it he must have been born again. He might even, by keeping his pumps going and facing out the peril for another couple of hours, have run the *One-and-All* into Torbay and saved her; but he had not wanted to save her. Nevertheless, when he had run down to collect his few treasures from the cabin, these binoculars were his first and chiefest thought, for they attached him to something in his base career which had been noble. So careful was he, so fearful of facing eternity and judgment—if drown he must—without them, that, although the time was short and the danger instant, and the man by this time a coward, he had stripped off oilskin coat and pea-jacket to indue them again and button them over his treasure.

Yet either his hands were numb or the sea-water had penetrated these wraps and damped the tag of the leathern case, making it difficult to open. When at length he tugged the binoculars free and sighted them, it was to catch one glimpse, and the last, of the child waving from the bulwarks.

"Good Lord deliver us!"

A high-crested wave blotted out the schooner's hull. She seemed to sink behind it, almost to midway of her main shrouds. She would lift again into sight as that terrible wave went by—

But she did not. The wave went by, but no portion of her hull appeared. With a slow lurch forward she was gone, and the seas ran over her as though she and her iniquity had never been.

In that one glimpse through his binoculars the master, and he alone of the crew, had recognised the child—Calvin Rosewarne, his owner's son.

To their credit, the men pulled back for the spot where the *One-and-All* had gone down. Not till an hour's battling had taught them the hopelessness of a search hopeless from the first did they turn the boat and head again for Brixham.

The news, telegraphed from Brixham, began to spread through Troy soon after midday. Since the

law allowed it, over-insurance was accepted by public opinion in the port almost as a matter of ordinary business; almost, but not quite. In his heart every citizen knew it to be damnable, and voices had been raised in public calling it damnable. Men and women who would have risked nothing to amend the law so far felt the public conscience agreeing with their own that they talked freely of Rosewarne's punishment as a judgment of God. Folks in the street canvassed the news, insensibly sinking their voices as they stared across the water at the elm trees of Hall. Behind those elms lay a house, and within that house would be sitting a man overwhelmed by God's vengeance.

In the late afternoon a messenger knocked at Hester's door with a letter. It was brought to her where she sat, with Mrs. Trevarthen, by Aunt Butson's bedside, and it said—

"I wish to speak with you this evening, if you are willing.—S. ROSEWARNE."

She rose at once, silently, with a glance at her two companions. They had not spoken since close upon an hour. When first the news came the old woman on the bed had raised herself upon her elbow, struggled a moment for utterance, and burst into a pæan of triumphant hatred, horrible to hear. Mrs. Trevarthen sat like one stunned. "Hush 'ee, Sarah!

Hush 'ee, that's a good soul!" she murmured once and again in feeble protest. At length Hester, unable to endure it longer, had risen, taken the invalid by one shoulder and forced her gently back upon the pillow.

"Tell me to go," she said, "and I will leave you and not return. But to more of this I will not listen. I believed you an ill-used woman; but you are far less wronged than wicked if you can rejoice in the death of a child."

Since then the invalid had lain quiet, staring up at the ceiling. She did not know—nor did Mrs. Trevarthen know—whose letter Hester held in her hand. But now, as Hester moved towards the door, a weak voice from the bed entreated her—

"You won't leave me! I didn't mean that about the child—I didn't, really!"

"She didn't mean it," echoed Mrs. Trevarthen.

"I know—I know," said Hester, and stretched out both arms in sudden weariness, almost despair. "But oh! why in this world of burdens can we not cast away hate, the worst and wilfullest?"

It seemed to her that in her own mind during these few weeks a light had been steadily growing, illuminating many things she had been wont to puzzle over or habitually to pass by as teasing and obscure. She saw the whole world constructed on one purpose,

that all living creatures should love and help one another to be happy. Even such a man as Rosewarne found a place in it, as one to be pitied because he erred against this light. Yes, and even the death of this child had a place in the scheme, since, calling for pity, it called for one of the divinest exercises of love. She marvelled, as she crossed in the ferry-boat, why the passengers, one and all, discussed it as a direct visitation upon Rosewarne, as though Rosewarne had offended against some agreement in which they and God Almighty stood together, and they had left the fellow in God's hands with a confidence which yet allowed them room to admire the dramatic neatness of His methods. She longed to tell them that they were all mistaken, and her eyes sought old Daddo's, who alone took no part in this talk. But old Daddo pulled his stroke without seeming to listen, his brow puckered a little, his eyes bent on the boat's wake abstractedly as though he communed with an inward vision.

At the front door of Hall Susannah met her, white and tearful.

"I heard that he'd sent for you." Susannah sank her voice almost to a whisper. "He's in the counting-house. You be'n't afeard?"

"Why should I be afraid?"

"I don't know. He's that strange. For months

now he've a-been strange; but for two days he've a-sat there, wi'out food or drink, and the door locked most of the time. Not for worlds would I step into that room alone."

"For two days?"

"Ever since he opened the poor child's letter; for a letter there was, though the Lord knows what was in it. You're sure you be'n't afeard?"

Hester stepped past her and through the great parlour, and tapped gently on the counting-house door. Her knock was answered by the sound of a key turning in the lock, and Rosewarne opened to her.

At the moment she could not see his face, for a lamp on the writing-table behind silhouetted him in black shadow. Her eyes wandered over the room's disarray, and all her senses quailed together in its exhausted atmosphere.

He closed the door, but did not lock it again, motioned her to a chair, and dropped heavily into his accustomed seat by the writing-table, where for a while his fingers played nervously with the scattered papers. Now by the lamplight she noted the extreme greyness of his face and the hard brilliance of his eyes, usually so dull and fish-like.

"I am much obliged to you for coming," he began in a level, almost business-like tone, but without look-

ing up. "There are some questions I want to ask—you have heard the news, of course?"

"Everyone has heard. I am sorry—so sorry! It is terrible."

"Thank you," said he, with a slight inclination of the head, as though acknowledging some remark of small and ordinary politeness. "Perhaps you would like to see this?" He picked up a crumpled sheet of notepaper, smoothed out the creases, and handed it to her. Taking it, she read this, written in a childish, ill-formed hand—

"DEAR FATHER,—When this reaches you I shall be at sea. I hope you won't mind very much, as it runs in the family, and some of those that done it have turned out best. I don't get any good staying at home. I love you and you love me, but nobody else does, and nobody understands. I thought Miss Marvin understood, but she went away and forgot. Never mind, it will be all right when I am a man. I will come back, for you mustn't think I don't love you.—Your affect. son, C. ROSEWARNE."

As Hester looked up she found Mr. Samuel's eyes fixed on her for the first time, and fixed on her curiously.

"You don't approve, perhaps, of cousins marrying?" he asked slowly.

Was the man mad, as Susannah had hinted?

"I—I don't understand you, Mr. Rosewarne."

"Your mother had an only sister—an elder sister—who went out to Dominica, and there married a common soldier. Did you know this?"

"I knew that my mother had a sister, and that there had been some disgrace. My father never spoke of it, and my mother died when I was very young; but in some way—as children do—I came to know."

"I thought you might know more, but it does not matter now. My father was that common soldier, and the disgrace did not lie in her marrying him. Before the marriage—I have a copy here of the entry in the register—a child was born. Yes, stare at me well, Cousin Hester, stare at me, your cousin, though born in bastardy!"

His eyes seemed to force her backward, and she leaned back, clasping the arms of her chair.

"I learnt this a short while before my father died. I had only his word for it—he gave me no particulars; but I have hunted them up, and he told me the truth. Knowing them, I concealed them for the sake of the child that was drowned to-day; otherwise, the estate being entailed, his inheritance would have passed to Clem, and he and I were interlopers. Are you one of those who believe that God has punished me by drowning my son? You have better grounds than the rest for believing it."

"No," said Hester, after a long pause, remem-

bering what thoughts had been in her mind as she crossed the ferry.

"Why not?"

"The child had done no evil. God is just, or God does not exist. He must have had some other purpose than to punish you."

"You are right. He may have used that purpose to afflict me yet the more—though I don't believe it; but my true punishment—my worse punishment—began long before. Cousin, cousin, you see clearly! How often might you have helped me during these months I have been in hell! Can you think how a man feels who is afraid of himself? No, you cannot; but I say to you there is no worse hell, and through that hell I have been walking since the day I went near to killing Clem. You saved me that once, and then you turned and left me. I wanted you—no, not to marry me! When a man fears himself he thinks no more of affection. I wanted you, I craved for you, to save me—to save me again and again, and as often as the madness mastered me. A word from you would have made me docile as a child. I should have done you no hurt. On your walks and about your lodging at night I have dogged you for that word, afraid to show myself, afraid to knock and demand it. By this time I had discovered you were my cousin. 'Blood is thicker than water'—over and over I told

myself this. 'Sooner or later,' I said, 'the voice in our blood will whisper to her, and she will turn and help my need.' But you never turned, and why? Because you were in love, and if fear is selfish, love is selfish too!"

He paused for breath, eyeing her with a gloomy, bitter smile. "Oh, there's no harm in my knowing your secret," he went on. "I'm past hating Tom Trevarthen, and past all jealousy. All I ever asked was that he should spare you to help me—a cup of cold water for a tongue in hell; I didn't want your love. But that's where the selfishness of love comes in. It can't spare even what it doesn't need for itself. It wants the whole world to be happy; but when the unhappy cry to it, it doesn't hear."

Hester stood up, her eyes brimming. "You are right," she said, "I did not hear. I never guessed at all. Tell me now that I can help."

"It is too late," he answered. "I no longer want your help."

"Surely to-day, if ever, you need your neighbours' pity and their prayers?"

He laughed aloud. "That shows how little you understand! You and my precious neighbours think of me as brooding here, mourning for my lost boy. I tell you I am glad—yes, glad! *This* is no part of God's punishment! It was the future I feared: He

has taken it from me. I can suffer at ease now, knowing the end. See now, I have confessed to you the wrong I did that blind child, and the confession has eased me. I could not have confessed it yesterday—the burden of living grows lighter, you perceive. I don't repent; it doesn't seem to me that I have any use for repentance. If what I have done deserves punishment in another world, I must suffer it; but I know it cannot be half what I have suffered of late. No, cousin, I need you no longer. There is no sting to rankle, now that hope—hope for my boy—has gone. I can rest quiet now, with my own damnation."

She put out a hand, protesting, but he turned from her—they were standing face to face—and opening the door, stood aside to let her pass.

"I thank you for coming," he said gravely. "What I have told you—about the inheritance, I mean—will be no secret after the next few days."

She halted and looked at him inquiringly. "It will be a secret safe with me," she said. Her eyes still searched his.

For the second time he laughed. "The children will be home in a few days; I wait here till then. That is all I meant."

In the dusk by the ferry-slip old Daddo stood ready to push off. Hester was the only passenger,

for it was Saturday, and on Saturdays, at this hour, all the traffic flowed away from the town, returning from market to the country.

Her eyes were red, and it may be that old Daddo noted this, for midway across, and without any warning, he rested on his oars, scanning her earnestly.

"You have been calling on Rosewarne, miss?—making so bold."

She nodded.

"I see'd you looking t'ards me just now as we crossed. I see'd you glance up as *they*, in their foolishness, was reckoning they knew the mind o' God. Tell me, miss, how he bears it?"

"He bears it; but without hope, for his trouble goes deeper."

CHAPTER XXVII

HOME

Mr. Benny, arriving next morning at the ferry to cross over to his office, opened his eyes very wide indeed to see the boat waiting by the slip and his late master, Samuel Rosewarne, standing solitary within it, holding on to a shore-ring by the boat-hook.

"But whatever has become of Dadda?" Mr. Benny's gaze, travelling round, rested for one moment of wild suspicion on the door of the "Sailor's Return," hard by.

"With your leave he has given up his place to me for a while," said Rosewarne slowly. "I have come to ask you that favour, Mr. Benny."

The little man stepped on board, wondering, nor till half-way across could he find speech.

"It hurts me to see you doing this, sir; it does indeed. If old Nicky Vro could look down and see you so demeaning yourself, you can't think but he'd say 'twas too much."

"I did Nicky Vro an injury once, and a mortal

one. But I never gave him license to know, on earth or in heaven, what my conscience requires. It requires this, Mr. Benny; and unless you forbid it, we'll say no more."

The common opinion on both shores was that grief had turned Rosewarne's brain. He had prepared himself against laughter; but no one laughed: and though, as the news spread, curiosity brought many to the shores to see, the groups dispersed as the boat approached. Public penance is a rare thing in these days, and all found it easier to believe that the man was mad. Some read the Lord's retributive hand again in the form his madness took.

In silence he took the passengers' coppers or handed them their change. Few men had ever opened talk with Rosewarne, and none were bold enough to attempt it in the three days during which he plied the ferry.

"You left him lonely to his sinning; leave him alone now," said old Daddo, tilling his cottage-garden up the hill, to the neighbours who leaned across his fence questioning him about his share in the strange business. His advice was idle; they could not help themselves. Something in Rosewarne's face forbade speech.

On the evening of the third day he saw the signal for which he waited—the smoke of a tug rising above

the low roofs on the town quay, and above the smoke the top-gallants and royals of a tall vessel pencilled against the sunset's glow. With his eyes upon the vision he rowed to shore and silently as ever took the fees of his passengers and gave them their change; then, having made fast the boat, he walked up to Mr. Benny's office.

"You have done me one service," he said. "I ask you to do me a second. The *Virtuous Lady* has come into port; in five minutes or less she will drop anchor. Take boat and pull to her. Tell Mrs. Purchase that I have gone up the hill to Hall, and will be waiting there; and if you can persuade her, bring her ashore in your boat."

Mr. Benny reached up for his hat.

"Say that I am waiting to speak with her alone. On no account must she bring the children."

Up in the Widows' Houses, high above the murmur of the little port, no ear caught the splash as the *Virtuous Lady's* anchor found and held her to home again. In Aunt Butson's room Hester sat and read aloud to her patient. The book was the Book of Proverbs, from which Aunt Butson professed that she, for her part, derived more comfort than from all the four Gospels put together. For an hour Hester read on steadily, and then, warned by the sound of

regular breathing, glanced at the bed and shut the Bible.

Rising, she paused for a moment, watching the sleeper, opened and closed the door behind her gently, and bent her steps towards Mrs. Trevarthen's room, at the far end of the gallery; but on the way her eyes fell on a group of daffodils in bloom below, in the quadrangle. Two flights of stairs led up from the quadrangle, one at either end of the gallery; and stepping back to the head of that one which mounted not far from Aunt Butson's door, she descended and plucked a handful of the flowers. Returning to the gallery by the other stairway, she was more than a little surprised to see Mrs. Trevarthen's door, at the head of it, almost wide open. For Mrs. Trevarthen, worn-out and weary, had left her only an hour ago under a solemn promise to go straight to bed, and Hester had been minded to arrange these flowers for her while she slept.

"Mrs. Trevarthen!" she called indignantly from the stair-head. "Mrs. Trevarthen! What did you promise me?"

A tall figure, dark against the farther window, rose from its stooping posture over the bed where Mrs. Trevarthen lay, turned, and confronted her in the doorway with a glad and wondering stare.

"Miss Marvin!"

"Tom! oh, Tom!" cried his mother's voice within. "To think I haven't told you! But you give me no time!"

A minute later, as Hester walked away along the gallery, she heard his step following.

"But why wouldn't you come in?" he demanded, and went on before she could answer, "To think of your being Matron here! But of course mother had no time to reach me with a letter."

"She gave me yours to read," said Hester mischievously; whereat Tom flushed and looked away and laughed. "Tell me," she went on. "What did she answer?"

"She? Who?"

"Why, Harriet—wasn't that her name?"

"There's no such person."

"What? Do you mean to say it was all a trick, and there's no Harriet Sands in existence?"

"You're wrong now. There *is* a Harriet Sands, and she belongs to Runcorn too; only she's a ship."

"A ship? And the letter you made me write—it almost made me cry, too—was *that* meant only for a ship?"

"No, it was not—but you're laughing at me." He turned almost savagely, and catching sight of something in her eyes, stood still. "If you only knew—*do* you know?"

"I wish I did—I think I do."

He caught at her hands and clasped them over the daffodils.

"If ever I'm a widow," said a panting voice a few paces away, "if ever I'm a widow (which the Lord forbid!), I'll end my days on a ground floor 'pon the flat. Companion-ladders is bad enough when you've a man to look after; but when you've put 'en away and can take your meals easy, to chase a bereaved woman up a hill like the side of a house, an' *then* up a flight of stairs, for five shillings a week and all found—O-oh!"

Mrs. Purchase halted at the stair-head; and it is a question which of three faces was redder.

"O-oh!" repeated Mrs. Purchase. "Here come I with news enough to upset a town, and simmin' to me here's a pair that won't value it more'n a rush. Well-a-well! Am I to go away, my dears, or wish 'ee fortune? You're a sly fellow too, Tom Trevarthen, to go and get hold of a schoolmistress, when 'tis only a little schoolin' you want to get a certificate and be master of a ship. That's the honest truth, my dear"—she turned to Hester. "'Twas he that worked the *Virtuous Lady* home, and if you can teach 'en navigation to pass the board, he shall have her and you too. Do I mean it? Iss, fay,

I mean it. I'm hauled ashore. 'Tis 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant,' with Hannah Purchase."

Late that evening Clem and Myra walked hand in hand, hushed, through the unkempt garden—their garden now, though to their childish intelligence no more theirs than it had always been. They might lift their voices now and run shouting with no one to rebuke them. They understood this, yet somehow they did not put it to the proof. Home was home, and the old constraint a part of it.

Late that same evening Samuel Rosewarne passed down the streets of Plymouth and unlatched the door of a dingy house which, empty of human love, of childhood, of friendship, was yet his home and the tolerable refuge of his soul. He no longer feared himself. He could face the future. He could live out his life.

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